



St John Lutheran Church

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2nd Cor. 12: 9

Things are not as they appear

For Sonya

Dear Joe, Ashley, Adam...the rest of Sonya's family...her family of faith here at St. John and her many, many friends. Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Heavenly Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ:

St. Paul writes: 12:9 And He said to me, **"My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness."** Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Things are not as they appear. **Today, as we** gather to say good-bye to this dear one...**the world** and the devil would like us to be sad...**to be hopeless. The world and** satan would like nothing better than for us to throw up our hands today in frustration and grief and say that death is natural...**that it** is the way of all flesh...**that all** life is useless...**we are born...we live** for a time and then we suffer and finally we die. **That's it...that's all. Nothing more. This is what** the world would call "truth" and it offers very little in the way of any hope or comfort.

On the surface...this does look like the truth. **But Dear Friends...things are** not as they appear.

These questions always come up and no doubt many of you have asked some or all of them yourselves: **"If God really loves us, why does He let such things happen? Why didn't He answer our prayers that this beautiful young woman in her prime be healed of the disease that took her life? Does it do any good at all to pray, if God doesn't seem to listen...if He doesn't do what we ask Him to do?"**

Is there a person gathered with us here today who did not pray for Sonya to be healed of her cancer? **We prayed together...we prayed individually... we prayed and prayed...and yet Sonya died...what's the use??"**

On the surface...this does look like the way it is...**But Dear Friends... things are** not as they appear.

"My Grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness." Jesus tells us.

You see, we were not created to die! We were created to live forever in the Very Presence of our God! Our First Parents had it all...this world made just for them. Fellowship with God...imagine seeing our Holy God face to face and talking to Him as we would speak to one another. That's the way it was! Perfect health...perfect weather... a world free of pain and tears...they were perfect and free in every way. They had all this and our God's great blessing of free will and eternal life. That didn't last long. Adam sinned...that is he rebelled against God...and there is only one payment for sin... and that is death.

So death invaded a world that was free of death... disease, weakness, pain, grief...all came to us... and since that time this world has seen a seemingly endless cycle of one generation being born...living...dying and giving way to the next generation. Since Adam's Fall...death, pain and grief have been our constant companion and the world sees all this as "natural" ...but it's not!

We look out at all around us...these beautiful mountains...this beautiful country called America...this wonderful world and it all seems so permanent...it seems to us that this IS ALL THERE IS TO LIFE...that there cannot be anything else...anything more...anything better.

But things are not as they appear!

"My Grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

It is safe to say that God's Wisdom is not our wisdom ...in fact Scripture tells us this outright. It appears to us and our limited sin oriented and confused "wisdom" that God really doesn't care about us...that He really doesn't do anything to help us in our time of need. But things are not as they appear.

Dear Friends...God knows exactly how we feel... what we suffer...He knows that grief gathers us here today... He knows that we hurt at Sonya's passing. He knows that we are confused and looking for answers...looking for hope. You see death hurts us...grief strikes us with such disabling force precisely because it is not natural...death is not natural...that's why it hurts us the way it does.

Our God knows what we suffer and He took action. Not the kind of action the world would expect or even demand. Our God did not come with military power and glorious might. Our God became one of us...but He came as a little baby...born of a virgin.

The Second Person of the Trinity... the Living Word of God...the All Powerful Creator of everything ... this One left His Glory in Heaven to be flesh and blood...like us. He came to do what we could never do...live a perfect sinless life...live according to His Father's Will absolutely...and then after doing this...He died in our place! He suffered on a tortuous Cross...abandoned by His Father...so that we would never be abandoned! God died and He died in our place...taking our punishment on Himself!

Yet things were not as they seemed! Understand...that when Jesus Christ died on that Friday so long ago...when He gave up His Spirit and breathed His last breath...He was at that very moment

at His weakest. Yet at His weakest...at that very moment Jesus paid all of our debt...at that very moment He paid a price we could never pay...He literally paid the price needed to get us back into Paradise face to face with our Heavenly Father! You see that is what being Redeemed means...that we are bought back to what we once were in the Garden.

At His weakest moment...Jesus Christ secured our eternal destiny...our Heavenly and eternal heritage. Things were not as they seemed. Satan and the world thought that the Son of God was dead...that He was defeated once and for all...hey...He was dead...hanging on a Cross when a Roman soldier drove a spear into His side to insure that Jesus was in fact stone dead!

All of our Lord's friends and followers ran and hid...all but a few women and a young Apostle named John. They all thought that Jesus was defeated...that the situation was hopeless! He was dead and buried!

But things were not they way they seemed! Three days later... this same Jesus rose from the grave. Jesus not only paid the price for our sin and restored or our place in Paradise...He also conquered death once and for all! Jesus seemed so weak...He came as an infant born in poverty. Yet this Jesus while He was at His mother's breast still controlled all things

He looked weak and powerless...and yet He was and is Lord of all. He grew into manhood and was homeless (in an earthly sense) He wandered about preaching and teaching...there seemed to be nothing remarkable about Him. Yet when He spoke people were healed of awful diseases... when He spoke the storm stopped...when He spoke the dead came to life... you see things were not as they seemed!

Some years ago...our sister Sonya was baptized into the death and the Life our this Lord Jesus! It didn't seem like much by worldly standards ... a little water...some Scripture read...no big deal...right? But it was then that our Lord called Sonya by name...it was then that He marked Sonya as His own...it was then that He gave her the Promise and the assurance of eternal life in His Everlasting Kingdom. The Living Word of God in the flesh...the Prince of all the Universe proclaimed on that day that death no longer had any hold on Sonya! Our Lord speaks and things happen!

Our Lord takes the weak & common things of this world and He conforms them to His purpose. He took bread and broke and gave it to His disciples and said take eat this is my Body, given for your sins. He took the cup of wine and blessed it and said take drink, this is my Blood shed for the remission of your sins! Again this doesn't look like much according to the world, but in His Supper, our Lord Christ communicates His Divine forgiveness of sin...He touches His people with His Body and Blood and assures them of their place in His Kingdom!

My Grace is sufficient for you, my strength is made perfect in weakness! Dear friends, if you doubt this at all...just look at Sonya's life for this past year. This cancer cut her down and she seemed so weak...so small and frail. But things were not at all the way they seemed. Sonya clung to the faith given to her in her baptism. When she was afraid...she sought our Lord in His Word

and in His Supper...**and He** was there for her. **She came into** this sanctuary, week after week...**knowing that** here her Lord would be here for her...**and He** was... **and He is! It was astounding** to see!

So much has happened this last year that I could never chronicle it all...**but it was** an amazing thing to witness. **In her weakness** our Lord's strength was present and being made perfect. **This community closed** ranks around Joe and Sonya and the kids... **and supported** them in most wonderful ways**the same** is true of this congregation and family of faith. **Generosity was the norm and not the exception! Love overflowed. God's strength was** being made perfect in weakness!!

And it was a privilege to witness and be part of all of this...**but what** was most amazing was Sonya's reaction. **With all the** support she was getting... **Sonya wanted** to reach out and help others! **With terminal cancer** and a failing body...**Sonya was** concerned about others! **She told Joe** that they needed to find a way to help people like them! **Dear folks this** is God's Divine Power being made known in our weakened and ill Sonya. **This is the way** our God works...**this is the way He answers prayer.**

These last few weeks especially... **Sonya was** strengthened by her Lord and His Word. **Last week I** went to the house and gave her and Joe communion. **We read some** Scripture and chatted some...**she asked** some questions and I did my best to answer them...**and through** it all...**our Lord's** Word braced Sonya and gave her comfort and confidence. **You could see her relax...even in her pain!**

And so we gather today to remember how our Lord displays His Power...how he works among His people. The world would tell us that this is the end...that we bury this Dear woman and move on...that's it...that's all. But things are not as they seem...are they?

This is temporary. This world is temporary. We will see Sonya again. Our Lord will come on the clouds, with all of His saints who have gone before us...and at His Command the dead will rise imperishable...and we will see our Lord face to face and with Him...there Sonya will be. With that 1000 watt smile and those huge hazel eyes...more beautiful than ever...there Sonya will be.. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

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