

St. James Lutheran Church
Sven Jorgensen Memorial Service
June 5, 2010
Richard Holmer

First Reading: Isaiah 40:28-31
Second Reading: Psalm 121
Gospel: Matthew 5:1-12

When Madeleine came in on Tuesday to make plans for this service, she brought along a page she had torn from one of our worship bulletins. On that page was a hymn we sang last summer as our hymn of praise: “O God Beyond All Praising.” Madeleine has incorporated the words to this hymn as a regular element in her prayers. We will sing this hymn as our recessional at the conclusion of our service today.

The tune for “O God Beyond All Praising,” is by the English composer, Gustav Holst, and is borrowed from his orchestral suite, “The Planets.” This stirring melody gives life to the text, written by Michael Perry.

I love this hymn, too—and I find the words to be appropriate for this occasion. In the first verse we sing these words: “We can only wonder at every gift you send, at blessings without number and mercies without end.”

Today we give thanks to God for the blessing he sent to us in the form of Sven Jorgensen. As we have already been reminded in the eulogies today, Sven was a man of substance—a true gentleman. We could not begin to recount the ways he was a blessing to his family and friends. When they first came to St. James a few years back, I was charmed by the story of how Sven and Madeleine met while he was serving with the army in France—and how they had returned there later in life and spent ten years living on a barge and travelling the waterways of Europe. How romantic is that?

Sven was a classy guy—and I enjoyed his sense of humor. Every Lutheran congregation should have at least one member named Sven. We were blessed with a Sven of exceptional quality.

The second verse of the hymn contains these words; “And whether our tomorrows be filled with good or ill, we will triumph through our sorrows and rise to bless you still.” I have a lot of respect for the way Sven persevered through the trials of his illness. He maintained his cheerful and positive demeanor when I visited him, whether at home or in the hospital. He was not inclined to complain or feel sorry for himself. More often, he spoke of his gratitude—especially for Madeleine.

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Like Sven, we also hope to “triumph through our sorrows.” There is nothing easy about death and loss. The pain of his absence is genuine and heartfelt.

Yet this notion of “triumphing through our sorrows” is a great theme of Christian faith. Jesus is our model, as the letters to the Hebrews reminds us:

“let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.”
Hebrews 12:1-2

This is our calling and our destiny to persevere and finally triumph.

During my last visit with Sven he asked me to read the verses we heard in our second reading, The Beatitudes from the fifth chapter of Matthew. In this passage Jesus articulates the unexpected, counter-intuitive nature of a faithful life. He says:

- * “Blessed are the poor in spirit”—that is, the ones who know their need for God.
- * “Blessed are those who mourn”—as we are at this very moment.
- * “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness”
- * “Blessed are those who are persecuted...”

These verses are in the same spirit as other sayings of Jesus:

- * “everyone who humbles himself will be exalted”
- * “the last shall be first”
- * Those who lose their life for my sake will find it”

In Christ, we learn to see things differently. The way Christ lived, the way Christ died, the way Christ was raised from the dead—the reality that he is alive today, all cause us to recalibrate our perceptions, our prospects and our priorities.

What is it that can be truly said? Is life finally sad, tragic, even futile? Or is life ultimately joyful, redeemed, worthwhile?

How we answer matters a great deal. Certainly, our lives are touched by sadness and tragedy. At times we are frustrated by the seeming futility of our best efforts.

Nevertheless, we do not lose heart. We are sustained by our hope in Christ, our Savior—a hope that will not disappoint us. As the psalm says: “Weeping may spend the night, but Joy comes in the morning.” God’s grace can turn our wailing into dancing.

As Paul says: “If God is for us—who can (finally) be against us?”

The prophet Isaiah was acquainted with the sustaining goodness of God: “Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

As we wait for the Lord, we do not wait alone. We are strengthened and upheld by this community of faith. Grace flows to us in tangible ways through these family members—our brothers and sisters in Christ. Left to our own devices, we certainly could come to feel lost and forsaken—but we are not alone. This fellowship of believers helps to bear our burdens, reminds us of the promise, shares the peace of God, breaks bread together—all serving to make Jesus Christ truly present, in and among us.

So today we say, thanks be to God for the gift he gave us in Sven Jorgensen. Thank you for giving him to us to know and to love.

And thanks be to God for the grace and peace that we share in Jesus Christ our Lord. Thank you for the hope that empowers us to triumph through all our sorrows.

Amen