

Requiescat in Pace – Deloris Elaine Koller

Isaiah 25:6-9

Revelation 21:2-7

John 14:1-6

Deloris has finished the race. Ninety-five years is a long race. My back surgeon told me that we all get hunched over as we get older. The discs in our back get worn out. It isn't just our backs that wear out. Some older folks ask, some older folks complain: "Why has God let me live this long?" I never heard that from Deloris. To be sure, she was ready to go but she didn't complain about waiting around.

We get worn out, don't we? Life is not easy. Who here doubts that the world is broken? Sin and Satan are making inroads to those things that, humanly speaking, we believed were strong. The burdens we bear spiritually wear on our backs and faith can get hunched over.

God uses difficulty. For our good, God uses difficulty. Here's upper-level Christianity: "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Romans 8:3-5). Endurance, character, and hope – isn't that Deloris? God was the potter, molding the clay of Deloris using the difficulties that she faced. Deloris suffered but she suffered quietly. Without self-pity or public drama, Deloris sought solace in the Lord of the cross. Jesus bore it for her. Deloris knew that Jesus bore His cross for *her*. Through learning of His suffering, she learned endurance for her race, a 95-year-long race. Some people lose hope in this life. People lose hope because they lose sight of Him. Character devolves because we start feeling sorry for ourselves or because we think that the world owes us something. Those ideas rankled Deloris' Iowa sensibilities.

Iowa sensibilities; you can take the girl out of the farm but you can't take the farm out of the girl. Personal industry; folks born in 1925 learned that hard work was a way of life. People who survived the Great Depression didn't give up. Deloris didn't get her high school diploma the way most kids do. Tenacious and scrappy, Deloris got her diploma at the ripe old age of 49 on the very day her youngest child got hers. This was a woman who valued manners. How you presented yourself mattered. She taught her children how to carry themselves with dignity and she ran the LWML at various congregations with an equally high standard. When she came to church she was put together. It wasn't for show or an attempt to fish for compliments, it was simply part of her persona. Church matters and she knew it. Church matters and she wasn't going to act as though it didn't.

I've got three quintessential Deloris moments that capture not only her, but our magnificent faith. The first is from this last spring. During those more temperate months, we conducted the Divine Service outside. Covid concerns put us in our superlative courtyard. From Easter to our congregation's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we transformed the space behind you into a sacred space. We controlled what we could. We couldn't control the temperature. Deloris was there. Little, dainty, old Deloris. She didn't come equipped. She slipped inside the door, insulated from the

wind/cold, and from her singular perch participated perfectly in the wonder of God serving sinners with forgiveness, life, and salvation.

Deloris knew that God had prepared for her a feast. By leaving His divine throne and taking up the form of a servant, Jesus, the Son of God, came to feed Deloris with the bread of life. He was the feast. She was in the Divine Service to receive what God willed to give her. On Mt. Calvary, the crucified King swallowed up death forever. Pierced, He is nailed to a tree. A sacrifice, Jesus pays the price that no mere human could offer. True God, He dies. Not a peaceful, antiseptic, hospice kind of death. The Son of God submits to a wretched torture out of love for you. Deloris came to hear that Word of truth, that word of forgiveness, and to receive what Christ the King laid out for her – a banquet of redemption and hope. She thrived on it. She needed it. She honored Christ's sacrifice by gladly partaking of what He willed to give her. Those spring Sundays of 2021 are indicative of a life lived receiving God's grace.

The second moment is when I visited her in the hospital, shortly before she died. I saw her the next day, with Debbie and Linda, but this moment was the night before, just Deloris and I, Tuesday evening. She was childlike; a 95-year-old little girl. I comforted her with my touch but much more with the Words of Scripture. Deloris was a student of Scripture. She knew it. She treasured it. The value of God's Word was written on her heart. When she heard her pastor's voice, when she heard the Word that has long enlivened her soul, it was like a soft, warm blanket was being put around her. She knew that her Lord was her shepherd and she was Jesus' little lamb. She knew that the tomb-shattering Savior was the way, the truth, and the life. She knew that Jesus had prepared a place for her. She knew that she was going home. I saw a little girl, supremely content to be in Christ's embrace. She received His blessing as I spoke it over her.

We are all children of our heavenly Father. He watches over us. He protects us. He teaches us what is true and noble and lasting and heavenly. What is true and noble and lasting and heavenly is His Son. Life is elevated in His company. The world is a sewer. Man's natural inclinations are selfish, violent, and petty. Christ liberates us from self and draws us into the expanse of His life. It is not only for this world that we live. There is more; more than our carnal appetites, more than the lust of our eyes, more than the momentary high that the world promotes. God has loved you with an entirely selfless love and has given each of you the greatest of treasures. "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

Eternal life; that is the third moment I see. In my mind's eye, I see Deloris as she is now. Radiant, unencumbered by sin or frailty, fully alive, stunningly holy, full of joy, fully herself – that is the result of the Jesus' death and resurrection, that is the result of Christ's ascension. "Behold, I am making all things new" (Revelation 21:5). Green pastures and still waters; a wedding feast that makes the cup of joy runneth over; "He is not here, for he has risen, as he said" (Matthew 28:6). Those realities animate Deloris' eternal soul. When Deloris was baptized, new life invaded her being. When Deloris was baptized on December 20, 1925 Easter became her defining reality. When she slipped out of this world into Christ's embrace, that new life was realized fully. It was a long race but Deloris has won the prize.

We who are gathered here journey in the Way. We who continue our pilgrimage in this broken world have our ears attuned to the voice of our Good Shepherd: “Come unto me and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:35-39). This world will likely continue to bring us challenges of heart, mind and body. We have an advocate (1 John 2:1). We have a defender. We have one who calls us by name and He leads us out (John 10:3). Deloris kept the faith. The Lord has called Deloris home. Blessed be Deloris Elaine Koller – the Lord has called her home.