



**In Memoriam + Janet Mae Pugh**  
November 26, 1946 – December 17, 2018

Dear family and friends of our departed sister in Christ, Janet:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

“Let not your hearts be troubled,” said Jesus. “Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”

“Let not your hearts be troubled,” said Jesus. The disciples might have thought it a silly thing to say. It was the night of the Last Supper in the upper room. Jesus had told them several times that His death was coming by way of a cross, and now that death was imminent. In a little while, they wouldn’t see Him anymore. In a little while, they’d be separated from Him by a stone rolled across the mouth of the tomb. It was gut-wrenching, this inevitability. Yet there was Jesus telling His disciples, “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

It wasn’t just an empty, “There, there” or “It’ll be okay.” The Lord doesn’t speak empty words any more than He dies a futile death. He told them, “I go to prepare a place for you ... And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.” It was an astonishing promise: death is the great separator, the ultimate isolator after all. But Jesus declared that He was departing for their good, so that He might prepare heaven for them. Furthermore, His cross – no matter how terrible – was a big, necessary part of that preparation. It was the means to get the mansion prepared.

The Bible is clear that the wages of sin is death: death comes to all because all are sinful, and death is something that no one can defy or overcome. In this mortal state, we *can’t* live forever. That is why Jesus, the sinless Son of God, became flesh, born of Mary. He came to take our place in death. He died our death for sin on that cross – suffered not just separation from friends and family, but the hellish separation from His Father in heaven. But that was not the end of Jesus. Three days later, He rose again from the dead. He came back – back out of the grave. He didn’t strike a deal or sneak out while death was taking a nap. He gutted death’s power. He tore a hole so great in the tomb that it could never be repaired, so that He might lead His people out of death into life.

That’s why He said, “Let not your hearts be troubled.” He already knew the other side – He’d been there from eternity. He’d come from heaven, and He was going back in such a way as to open it for all. The disciples couldn’t see it yet, though; reason and grief both argue that death is the end. It was Thomas who voiced their thoughts: “Lord, we don’t know where You are going. How can we know the way?”

It was then that Jesus declared this powerful promise: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” Where the disciples had had no hope, now there was a way past death to life, a way out of the grave. His name was Jesus.

His name is Jesus. And that is why, here today, I say to you only for the sake of Christ, “Let not your hearts be troubled.”

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Janet arrived at Good Shepherd with a troubled heart, a heart bowed down with grief. If anything, her pain was more acute than the disciples in our text: she’d lost her son David, and there are few griefs more bitter than the loss of a child, no matter the age. Janet spent Sundays at first by herself in the back row, watching and listening and then slipping away. It was a while before she finally introduced herself; and after some conversation, she enrolled in our instruction class. Soaked it in. She asked to join, she confessed the faith, she rejoiced in forgiveness and she knelt at the altar to receive the Lord’s body and blood. In Christ, she found peace, a peace that the world cannot give. See, apart from Christ, peace in this world only comes when there is an absence of trouble, and so peace can’t be found while mourning remains; but Christ provides peace in the midst of trouble, and so Janet could be at peace in the midst of grief.

From there, Janet’s story is an example that I will warmly recall and share in years to come. Having freely received God’s gifts of grace and peace, she freely gave. She helped out with meals and with VBS. She offered rides to those who couldn’t drive themselves to church – not because she had to, but because she could. Not because she had to pay the Lord for His grace and peace, but because His grace and peace had set her free to do things just like these. It is a humbling thing to hear about how much she loved her church family here, and we in turn give great thanks to God for her, and that He provided the time for her to be among us.

Janet is gone too soon. I don’t think anyone will disagree; and while I give thanks to the Lord for His eternal faithfulness to her, I will pour out my complaint to Him a bit that we would have been pleased for her to remain among us much, much longer.

But here we are, gathered in Janet’s memory. As St. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5, our bodies here are our earthly tents, and earthly tents wear out. So, says Paul, we groan in this tent as the wear and tear build up, and we wait for a better dwelling to come – and it does! Thus Janet’s death is not the end, but really only the beginning.

For when Jesus spoke to His disciples in the upper room the night when He was betrayed, His words were not just for them. They were for Janet, too. You and I would consider Janet a wonderful woman, but she was still sinful, still under the curse of death, and she would be the first to admit that truth: she said so every Sunday, as do we all about ourselves. So on the night when He was betrayed, Jesus said for the sake of Janet, “Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many rooms...I go to prepare a place for you.”

That night, He said those words for Janet. He also made those promises to Janet. At her baptism, Jesus said, “Believe in Me.” Not as in, “This is what you have to do,” but “Let there be faith – I give it to you by water and the Word. By this baptism, I join you to My death, and also to My resurrection. You’ve already died your death to sin with Me; so many years from now, when

your body ceases in this sinful world, that is not the end. I've led the way through death and out of the grave, and I am that way for you."

The Lord repeated that Word so that Janet might not forget it, for one can abandon the faith and life that He gives; and a few years back, He gathered her into Good Shepherd so that she heard it a lot. With each absolution, with each proclamation of Gospel, Jesus renewed that promise, that life. Each time, He said to her, "Let not your heart be troubled. You are Mine. Even when you walk through the valley of the shadow of death, fear no evil – for I am with you. I've already walked there, and I've come out the other side. My rod and My staff will comfort you, and I will raise you up again to eternal life."

And in preparation for that passage through death to life, the Lord fed her – fed her with His Supper, His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. "This do in remembrance of Me," said the Lord to Janet, "because I do not, will not forget you."

That was the Lord's promise to Janet. Not only to her, but to you as well. It's not a closed group: in the Father's house are many rooms, and salvation is offered to all. There is hope: for in Christ, there is life after death forever.

Dear friends, these are not empty words intended to white-wash the tragedy of death. You mourn today because death is a terrible reality. But you need not mourn as those who have no hope. Even in the face of death, there is joyful certainty in Christ. It is why St. Paul could declare, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through [Christ] who loved us." Death is conquered for us, because Christ has conquered it and made us conquerors with Him by His grace. Take note, however, how He conquered death – He did so by His own death in our place. It looked like defeat until He rose again. So it is with the people of God, because they follow in His footsteps. Their death looks like loss, defeat and the end, just like Jesus' death until He rose. But He did rise again, and Janet will too; and her resurrection is going to be likewise spectacular!

Though you are separated from Janet by death this day, she is not separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and you are not separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. And so, in Christ, Janet is not that far away.

In the midst of your grief, let not your hearts be troubled. For the sake of Jesus, Janet's 72 years here were only a good start; and now she has eternal life in Christ where sickness and affliction and grief and all the burdens of this life are former things that have passed away. Her cancer is dead, but Janet lives. The Lord Jesus Christ has led the way through death unto life for her.

Jesus is the way. That is the truth. So Janet has life.

This promise is not just for her, but for all of the Lord's people, for all who trust in Him. Let not your hearts be troubled, for Christ has died and Christ is risen for you.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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