

Funeral message for Helen Vogel
May 22, 2021

“That My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11)

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and risen Savior, Jesus Christ.

Dear loved ones of Helen, - Don and Shirley, Lynn, Mildred, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and all of you brothers and sisters in Christ, who are connected to the Vine -Jesus Christ through faith, the text that we hear now to celebrate Helen’s victory and complete joy with the Lord is from John 15:5, Helen’s confirmation text.

“I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5)

And Jesus continues to give us His special promise 6 verses later.

“These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:11)

What things were spoken to Jesus’ followers? What things were spoken to have not just a little joy, but full joy in the life of a disciple?

The things that Helen learned in her confirmation verse!

Jesus used this illustration of the Vine and the branches to tell how He is the source of all forgiveness, life and **joy**. Connected to Him you have everything. Separated from Him you have nothing – nada...an unbeliever becomes a dried up branch that is gathered and thrown into the fire of hell.

Yes, a said a little Spanish there, “nada” , because Helen liked to say a few Spanish phrases as she recounted her life connected to the Vine – her Lord Jesus. In the Lord’s great mercy, the Jesus connected her to Him in the Rio Grande Valley, known for its farming and citrus and bilingual people.

It was here that her branch was connected through Baptism on May 23, 1920. On that day the Lord made her clean through His word as verse 3 says just two verses before her confirmation verse.

“You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you.”

The robe of Jesus’ righteousness clothed her in His love. He claimed her as His child and set out to make her a most fruitful branch. The Father is the Gardener, and the Holy Spirit is the giver of spiritual gifts whose coming to His New Testament Church on Pentecost we celebrate tomorrow.

As I said yesterday at the funeral home, a lot of good things happened in May. There’s a well know saying, “April showers bring May flowers”. And Helen who was born in April, born a sinner under the law, was given a rebirth, a new birth in May, May 23rd by water and the word in her baptism.

Fourteen years later, we see how the Lord had tended to Helen so that she confessed her faith in her Lord on May 27, 1934 and received her confirmation verse.

“I am the Vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

By then, the Lord had already been very busy pruning the branch that He loved. Why so that Helen would bear much fruit. So Jesus said in John 15:2,

“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit.” (John 15:2)

Pruning and tending crops is something farmers know well. As God’s people, we all know that pruning includes bearing the Christian cross, going through hardships, and persecution to refine and strengthen the Christian faith. St. Paul puts it this way in Hebrews 12:11.

Hebrews 12:11

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

Helen was trained in it. The Lord trained her throughout her 101 years to recognize the Lord's chastening. Whether it be a debilitating sickness that caused her not to walk in her childhood, the Great Depression, World war II, floods, hurricanes... she was trained. She was trained to recognize that she was a sinner and in constant need of Her Savior Jesus' forgiveness.

Some would call it Jesus' school of hard knocks. But God's chastening yields a big crop of righteousness and peace. Jesus' righteousness and peace – won for the world on the cross, for Helen, for you and me, and given to us sinners in His means of grace – His word and sacraments.

This weekend and the coming week, students will be graduating from High School. Our own school here at Immanuel will be having a graduation on Thursday. Helen's final graduation day came on May 15th. Another important day in May. For all Christians including Helen, Paul says in Philippians 1:21, **“For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”**

Helen lived, connected to the Vine, her Savior Jesus 101 years, lived in His peace and righteousness as a forgiven sinner, and then received her eternal gain when Jesus called her to her eternal home – to die is gain.

Yes, her diploma, the diploma given to all believers who have gone through the great tribulation as St. John said in our first Scripture reading from Revelation 7: 14 is the crown of life. Robed in white, the righteousness of Christ, the believers in Christ who have been connected to the Vine all their lives, are received into His very presence for eternity!

“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” John said in the second chapter of Revelation verse 10.

Helen didn't throw her cap in the air, but as Don told us last night, she raised her finger in the air and pointed to the Author and Finisher of her faith who had now come to take her to her heavenly rest.

She had run the race and kept the faith. She had abided, remained in the Vine by for His namesake, by God's grace alone and now received the prize.

She was trained by her Lord to receive His Word for the nurturing of her soul and eat and drink of the very body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of her sins.

She was trained to willingly be led by her Good Shepherd, Jesus, to the green pastures and still waters of Jesus' word and Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.

For there something special happens, as Psalm 23 tells us in verse 3,

“He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake.”

That's what happens when a Christian repents of one's sins, one receives Jesus' righteousness. She was connected to the Vine, her Savior, Jesus, who nourished her continually, restored her continually with His forgiveness. All that she needed for her body and soul flowed to the branch named Helen.

And by the grace of God, she bore much fruit.

Wasn't a time that I could remember that Helen didn't have a smile on her face and was so glad to see you. Others have told me the same, as recently as last night at the funeral home. Well, that's the joy that Jesus gives to His people – His joy in this world of great tribulation.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,” Galatians 5:22

That My joy may remain in you and that your joy may be full. Jesus told His disciples in the very next chapter, in John 16 that He would be going away. Jesus had to die in order to give us the joy of salvation and the resurrection.

“A little while, and you will not see Me; and again a little while, and you will see Me”? 20 Most assuredly, I say to you that you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice; and you will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” (John 16:19-20)

Jesus did return three days later from the grave alive. And the disciples experienced amazing joy. When one of our loved ones leaves this world from us, there is sadness in our lives as we miss their presence and joyful spirit. We miss Helen, but the Holy Spirit comforts us with the good news that we will see our loved ones again in heaven. Jesus says in John 16:33.

“These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33)

Death has lost its sting. **“Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:57)**

Yes, Helen said to the Rio Grande Valley and to all of us on her 100th birthday, through the “Con Mi Gente” video:

“I’m so thankful to have known my Lord and Savior through the years.”

“It was hard, but with the Lord’s blessing, we made it.”

Yes, she made it by the grace of God! Remain in the Vine and receive all of God’s blessings of forgiveness, life and full joy so that by the grace of God, you can indeed say this day and every day,

“This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it.” (Psalm 118:24)

Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” Amen. (Philippians 4:7)