

This congregation, Carol's church family, eight years ago selected Psalm 26:8 for our 150th Anniversary: "*O Lord, I love the habitation of Your house and the place where Your glory dwells.*" Can it be a coincidence that this same Scripture passage was given to Carol on her Confirmation Day? A congregation, along with its members, cannot survive unless there is a love for the place of the Lord's habitation. God, in His grace, has given this love to our congregation even as He gave it to Carol.

Her love of being here in this house to receive the Lord's gifts; her love of serving God in this place; her love of taking what God gives here into her daily life, this was the work of God within her. No wonder she had a beautiful heart. No wonder she wore the smile that she did. No wonder she had such love for her family, her friends and neighbors, and her church family. Carol loved the habitation of God's house and the place where His glory dwells.

But this love Carol had did not come first. God's love did. His love for Carol and His love for you. We can, and we will, speak of Carol's love, but her place in heaven is because of God's love. Our love falls short; God's love does not. Our love is imperfect; God's love is perfect. Our love cannot bring us to God, but God in His love comes to us. His love has a name: Jesus. Jesus did for Carol what she could not do. He loved God perfectly. He kept the Law flawlessly. He suffered and died for every sinner; for you, me, and for Carol. And He rose in triumph on the Third Day. And so Jesus is the way to heaven. Our love cannot get us there. Our love is but a response to Jesus' love. But where Christ is, there is God's love; there is the door into heaven.

That door was there on Tuesday afternoon. Our eyes were kept from seeing it, but it happened, for this is God's promise. We were there; you were there with mom, with grandma, as Jesus carried her into heaven. We call it death, but for Carol it was life; life with Jesus forevermore. He came to His baptized daughter; His precious daughter for whom He lived, died, and rose again, and Jesus wrapped her in His arms and took her to heaven. What a sacred moment this was. What a privilege for me to be a part of it with you.

You have all heard Carol confess her faith in Jesus. You know how she longed for Him to come. You have witnessed her love for this habitation of God's house, this place where His glory dwells. Have confidence, therefore, in the promises of God. "*I am the Resurrection and the Life,*" Jesus says..."*I go to prepare a place for you, and I will come again to take you to Myself.*" Carol, by God's grace and working, believed these promises. This is why she loved this place of God's dwelling; this place where God forgives sins and gives eternal life through water and word, bread and wine.

As you know, I was on my way to the airport when I stopped on Tuesday afternoon. And when I came to the airport, it made sense to me what I saw. There are two lanes, one that says *Arrivals*, and one that says *Departures*. Watching those people in the departure area at the airport, you see hugs, kisses, and tears of sadness. Their loved one is about to depart from them. The arrival area is just the opposite. Smiles, embraces with tears of joy, hearts lifted with excitement.

On Tuesday afternoon you were in the departure area. Your loved one was leaving. And so you gave her hugs and kisses. You had many tears streaming down your faces. But dear family of Carol, you only saw the half of it. For as she was departing, she was also arriving. You didn't see it, but you believe it. All the saints in heaven were embracing her. There were tears of joy. The angels were ecstatic. And Jesus was smiling, His face full of love.

For there to be such a wonderful arrival there, there must be a sad departure here. But you need not be sad. You cannot see the arrival area from here. Not with your eyes. And so look with faith. Look beyond Carol's departure from you. Look beyond her death and her grave. Trust God's promises to you. Yes, His promises to Carol are just as much for you. You have a Savior, the same Savior from sin and death Carol has. His love for her is just as much for you. Jesus did nothing for Carol that He did not also do for you. You have Baptism, the Word of God, the Holy Sacrament. You have God's house, the place where His glory dwells. To have these sacred things makes our sad departure area heaven's joyful arrival area. They become one and the same in Christ.

May He embrace you in love, fill you with faith in His promises, and carry you one day into heaven as He did your beloved Carol. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.