
GOD WILL NEVER LET GO

My grandmother's name was Caroline.

- She was my biggest cheerleader and supporter as I prepared to become a pastor.
- She died before she ever got to hear me preach.
- I was thinking a lot about her as I reflected on All Saints Sunday this week.
 - And I suspect that each of you have those about whom you are thinking this day.

Today is All Saints Sunday, the day we remember those who GOD has given to us for a time,

- to know, to love, to define who we are in relationship to him or her.
- Today we remember those whom GOD has given to us for a time that seems too short,
- and who have since gone to be with our GOD who gave them to us.
 - And there is sorrow and there is pain and there is guilt and there is heartbreak.
 - We can't ever be the same again.

Human beings do not belong to each other.

- We are GOD'S children.
- We belong to GOD.
 - It is only by sheer grace that we are together for a time---for a little while.
- We receive GOD'S gift of another person in our lives with thanksgiving.
 - But we must also realize that this person is a gift.
 - We cannot hang on, or refuse to let go of one of GOD'S children when it is time for him or her to go to be with GOD.

Caroline was a gift, one of GOD'S own children.

- And for a time, GOD gave Caroline to the world,
 - in order that two human beings might have a child,
 - and later, in order that a man might have a wife,
 - and so that some children might have a mother,
 - and so that some other children might have a grandmother,
 - and so that some other people might have a neighbor and a friend.
- For those people, Caroline defined what it means to have a neighbor and a friend.
 - And for those children, Caroline made it clear what it means to have a mother or a grandmother.
 - And a man, through Caroline came to know what it means to be a husband and to have a wife.
 - And because of Caroline, the world understood more fully the greatness of the love of GOD.
 - GOD loved the world so much that GOD gave the world Caroline.
 - And that was nice of GOD!

But now Caroline is dead,

- and the world won't see her again.
 - And that's painful.

- No longer will Caroline be there to be the wife and the mother and the grandmother and the friend she was known to be.
 - And there is no way under heaven to minimize that pain.
- A part of those who knew her is dead:
 - that part called wife or mother or grandmother or friend.
 - That part called Caroline is gone.
 - And there is sorrow and there is pain and there is guilt and there is heartbreak.
 - We can never be the same again.

The only son of a woman in a small village in India died.

- Inconsolable, the woman went to see the holy man of the village.
 - The wise man handed her a basket and said to her, "Go to every home in the village and beg a grain of rice from each family that has not been visited by death.
 - "When you return at the end day with your basket full, your son will be restored to you."
- Joyfully, the woman began her quest.
 - At the end of the day, she returned to holy man.
 - Her basket, however, was empty.
 - There was not a single family in the village that had not experienced the death of a loved one.

"Blessed are those who mourn," says JESUS.

- There is not one of us here today who does not grieve over someone whom we have loved awhile and lost.
 - There is not one family circle represented before this altar today which has not been broken by death.

We remember our blessed dead especially at this time and at this service "For All the Saints."

- Mourning means to face the fact as Christians that death is not simply a process of nature,
 - but that it is indeed the wages of sin and the last enemy to be destroyed.
- We spend billions of dollars every year trying to cover death up and pretend it isn't really so terrible after all.
 - But the reality is that each one of us knows the loss of one who was loved as husband or wife,
 - or son or daughter,
 - or brother or sister,
 - or father or mother,
 - or grandfather or grandmother,
 - or neighbor or friend.
- Blessed are those who mourn," says JESUS, "for they shall be comforted."

Human beings do not belong to each other.

- We are GOD'S children.
- We belong to GOD.
 - It is only by sheer grace that we are together for a time---for a little while.
- We receive GOD'S gift of another person in our lives with thanksgiving.
 - But we must also realize that this person is a gift.
 - We cannot hang on, or refuse to let go of one of GOD'S children when it is time for him or her to go to be with GOD.

Caroline was a gift, one of GOD'S own children.

- And for a time, GOD gave Caroline to the world.
 - And that was nice of GOD.

But now Caroline is dead,

- and the world won't see her again.
 - We can never be the same again.
 - And that's all right.
 - Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

At one time or another, each of us must say goodbye to one of GOD'S own children,

- just as I once had to say goodbye to a beloved grandmother named Caroline.
 - But JESUS has said, "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn to joy, and your joy, no one will take away."
 - JESUS has said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."
 - And how shall we be comforted?
 - Through the ONE whom JESUS has told us to call, "Our FATHER".

GOD loves Caroline.

- And she belongs to GOD.
 - She always has.
- For a time, GOD gave Caroline to the world.
 - And that was nice of GOD.
 - But then the time came for Caroline to go to be with GOD.
- Each of us knows the emptiness.
- Each of us knows the sorrow.
 - That's the way it is with human beings.

We are here today, reluctantly, to offer Caroline and all the other saints we have known back to GOD.

- And in doing so we are also offering ourselves.

We are here to boldly say, "Our FATHER," and then to pray, "THY will be done."

- We are here to trust GOD, and to love GOD, and to realize how much GOD loves us,
 - just like GOD loved Caroline and all the others we ourselves have loved.
- We are here today to say goodbye to Caroline, one of GOD'S own children.
 - And today we must let go of her hand.
- But the comfort for we who mourn is that in doing so, we give her hand over to that of our heavenly FATHER.
 - We cannot let hold on.
 - We must let go.
 - But GOD has hold of her hand.
 - And GOD will never let go.