

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

As humans, we look for the perfection in life only to encounter the flaws. Our journey through the last several Sundays that revealed the dichotomy of Saint and sinner, wealthy and poor, childlike and wise. Today as we reflect upon the ultimate contrast of images and truths: life and death.

On All Saints Sunday, the Christian Church is dressed (adorned) in white; its most holy arraignments to reflect that today is indeed a day of celebration. Like Christmas and Easter, today is a festival Sunday that we rejoice in. The human truth to this day, my dear friends in Christ, is there is also another harsh dichotomy that we endure today: that of great sorrow and that of great joy and comfort.

Our Scripture lessons provide the Word of God to extend the promise and hope of the world to come and the comfort and peace for life today. Love is at the heart of the Scripture readings today. Our Old Testament lesson records Moses sharing God's promise (to Israel) of dwelling in a land flowing with milk and honey if they will love their Lord and God. The Psalmist rejoices and finds happiness in seeking the Lord with their hearts. The New Testament lesson reflects the full and complete love of God through Jesus Christ who makes the complete and final sacrifice for all sin. And our Gospel text reveals Jesus's words that declare the kingdom of heaven is indeed where the 'love of God' and 'the love for one another' abounds, thrives, and abides.

These are happy, comforting, and peaceful scriptures; words to build upon, words to start your day with, words to live by. Despite the power in the message, the world we live in hits us hard... and wounds us... and hurts us... and leaves us clinging to these words for the sake of our very life. And still, it is LIFE that triumphs, it is LIFE that wins, because it is LIFE that our Lord Jesus Christ offers; and He graciously offers life to all who believe in Him; and he offers it – ABUNDANTLY.

As individuals and as a family of faith, we share many happy and difficult times. Today is a special Sunday and I chose to focus on stories of ordinary, yet special, people within our family to emphasize the message and meaning in Holy Scripture for us in the context of our lives today.

A child comes into the world like every other person; pure, innocent, full of hope and full of life. As the hours of life with mom and dad begin, this life is different, but still special. A few days go by, but what is different is not so special anymore, now it is concerning. A few days later the 5-day-old baby girl is carried into a hospital. The burden of sadness and the weight of the world for two parents is now a reality. Knowing the condition is grave, a baptism is coordinated, mom holds onto hope, and dad finds a quiet place to pray the words; "Lord, this is *your* child to take home or leave with us as you will; I ask be behalf of her sister that you allow this life to remain. In all things Lord, Thy will be done."

In contrast, things could not be better several hours away in Moultrie, GA, where another set of parents are forming the happiest memories in their life. You see it was here where their sons were married, where friendships were bonded, and where the golf scores always seemed a little lower than anywhere else in the United States. Moultrie GA was *home* and a place of great comfort, peace, and happiness.

Home is all about family and several miles away another set of parents are establishing a family of their own. They bring three boys into the arms of the friends and a world waiting to welcome them. These three lives are the source of the greatest happiness that continues today to provide strength, happiness, and security.

The comfort of home, and the joy of family can only be matched by a mountaintop experience. Several states away in Acadia National Park, another couple share the ultimate mountaintop event to forever become a cherished memory and treasure. You see, this was both a special place and time in that their 20th Wedding anniversary was celebrated at Cadillac Mountain at a height of 1530 along the Atlantic Seaboard.

Cadillac Mountain is the first place in the United States to see, touch, and feel the morning sun as it greets the homes and families of our country. On this special day, the sun shined on them first and the moment was, in a word;

perfect! The beauty of a sunrise, the breathtaking view of the ocean, and the heartwarming conversation of two small chickadees (with a lot to share) cast a memory to remain ‘a comfort and a strength’ for them to accomplish anything!

My dear friends, these are the stories of life; these are the stories of home, family, and light in our world today; here and now. These are the stories to build upon, start your day with, these are the stories we all want to live by because they are all filled with everything good, hopeful, and right! These are the stories of God in our life!

God provides and sustains for all His people in every way. We live the best each day by the grace of God and give thanks for home, family, and the sunrises we are able to experience. However my friends, the truth remains: homes will move, families will grow, and the sun will rise in the sky to remind us that our stories do not stop with an experience, but continue to be written, encountered, and endured.

Ruth Allman is able to share her happiest memories of Moultrie, GA, because she can also share the saddest memory of when she came home and told her husband Bob that her son Bobby would not be coming home from the hospital. Ruth remembers the pain they endured as they hugged each other tightly and cried. Bobby has been struggling with an illness and went home to his Lord at the age of 37.

Phyllis Lacy is able to share and celebrate the life of her three wonderful sons, which grants her the courage and strength the share her saddest moment was when her husband Bob fell into her arms after receiving the results of a biopsy. A short time later Bob would be in the arms of his Lord and among his heavenly family.

For Nancy Grove, only one year after their sunrise experience on Cadillac Mountain, her husband David was diagnosed with ALS. From there a 13-year journey into darkness seemed inevitable. Nancy held David hand as the sun ‘set’ on a compassionate, gentle, and generous life.

The sadness and pain we encounter in human life is real; it is intense, crushing, and it is complete. We find ourselves asking where is the home, the family, and the light in our lives when our greatest love has been removed? What remains when our home is broken, our family is incomplete and the light in our life is very hard to find? My friends, it is in times of great sadness and great pain that our Lord shows us His perfection in life.

Our Lord came to us to provide life, and life abundantly. When life is taken away from us in the form of a loved one, God does not abandon us, but restores life by granting us the faith to repair our home, welcome new people into our family and allow the Son to shine in our lives through the countless faithful servants in the Kingdom of God.

After the prayer is offered for the 5-day-old infant daughter, dad ties bright yellow ribbons and bows on the trees in their yard with hopes that his daughter will come home. Later that night the little infant dies. And still, God hears the father’s prayer and a ‘miracle’ is extended through modern medicine. The child is resuscitated and will live to endure reconstructive heart surgery and 102 days in the hospital before coming home to the arms of her family and the light shining through her nursery window.

Today, that little girl is 23 years old and *is* home, family, and light for Karen, Alexis, and me; this is the story of my daughter Melissa. Her story and our experience represents for me the saddest and happiest time in my life that provides me the strength, compassion, and faith to serve as I am called in the Kingdom. Together with the family of Christ Lutheran Church we continue to welcome others into our family and our arms through the Light of the world that will shine forever.

Love is at the heart of these stories and love is at the heart of the readings in Holy Scripture today. My dear friends in Christ, God has made His home among us and within us; God has made us one family and provided the Light to live by. We live each day dead to sin and alive in Christ and during times of greatest sorrow we are assured of the perfect peace that passes all understanding to keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Amen.