



# Liturgical Day: Celebrating the Life and Faith of Bertha Barker

Date: August 26, 2009

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

For those of you who don't know, I am Pastor Dave Risendal, and I serve at Saint Peter Lutheran Church where Bertha has been a member since she moved to Denver from Florida a couple of years ago. We have loved having her as a member of our congregation, and have been blessed by her bright smile and her warm hugs. We'll miss her a great deal.

## Called By Name

Whenever Bertha came to worship with us, she would enter into the building the way we all do – by walking through our baptismal entrance. Our baptismal font is located between the two main entrance doors to our Worship Center. There are rocks there, reminding us of Saint Peter, the rock on whom Jesus promised to build the church. There is moving water there, reminding us that in these baptismal waters is the gift of life. And there are words carved into the baptismal area – words that you just heard Bertha's daughter read a moment ago:

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.*

These words are attributed to the Prophet Isaiah, who lived many years before our Lord was born. They are words that have given comfort and hope to the people of Israel, as they've sought to live faithfully and wait for the coming Messiah. They are also words that have become very important to Christians, and they serve as a reminder to us of the promise that is ours in baptism – the promise we celebrate this morning as we remember Bertha.

## The Promise of Baptism

We believe and teach that when we received the gift of those waters – when we were brought to the baptismal font – when water was poured over our heads (or, for some of us, when we were immersed in those waters) – when our names were called out by the one baptizing us – the voice may have belonged to the man or woman who was presiding at that ceremony, but in truth it was God who called us by name. It was God who said, "Bertha Barker, I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." It was God who said, "I will be with you through the good times and the bad. I will be your strength, your hope, your joy. I will empower you to live in faith. And when your journey is over, I will welcome you to your eternal home."

Those are the promises of baptism – the promises we remember and celebrate this morning. Nearly eight-eight years ago, Bertha's parents brought her to the font of her church in Dearborn, Michigan. They had no way of knowing where her life's journey would take her. I'm sure they couldn't even imagine a life in Denver in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with seven grandchildren and ten great-grandchildren spread out all over this country. But they knew what Isaiah had come to experience. They knew what countless Christians throughout the centuries have discovered. They knew that when God calls our name, we belong to God. And God promises never to leave us – to walk with us through the entire journey of our lives. To forgive

FIRST LESSON

ISAIAH 43:1-3A

PSALM

PSALM 27

SECOND LESSON

MICAH 6:6-8

EPISTLE

1<sup>ST</sup> CORINTHIANS 15:51-57

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O GOD OF GRACE AND GLORY,  
WE REMEMBER BEFORE YOU  
TODAY OUR SISTER, BERTHA. WE  
THANK YOU FOR GIVING HER  
TO US TO KNOW AND TO LOVE  
AS A COMPANION IN OUR  
PILGRIMAGE ON EARTH. IN  
YOUR BOUNDLESS  
COMPASSION, CONSOLE US  
WHO MOURN. GIVE US YOUR  
AID, SO WE MAY SEE IN DEATH  
THE GATE TO ETERNAL LIFE,  
THAT WE MAY CONTINUE OUR  
COURSE ON EARTH IN  
CONFIDENCE UNTIL, BY YOUR  
CALL, WE ARE REUNITED WITH  
THOSE WHO HAVE GONE  
BEFORE US; THROUGH YOUR  
SON, JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD.  
AMEN.

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God's work. Our hands.

us, to renew us, to strengthen us and to inspire us. And they trusted that with God in her life, Bertha would live with courage and with hope and with peace.

### **Strength in Christ**

By all accounts, our friend Bertha was a strong woman. Strong, in part, because that is how strong-willed Polish Matriarchs are. (Ron & George: maybe I need to try and get an "Amen" from you two on that one...) But strong also because of her faith, and because of the hope and purpose and peace that she received from Christ. She had her share of difficulties. Life didn't always go the way she may have wanted it to. But she was able to persevere, and to model that perseverance to her family, because of the strength she received from Christ. It is this strength that we want you to experience today. Whatever struggles you face; whatever challenges confront you; whatever pain and discouragement you suffer – we want you to know the peace of God that can carry you through.

This morning, I am especially mindful of Bertha's family. When we met yesterday, we shared stories about this remarkable woman. There were tears of both of sadness and joy. She was a large presence in this family, and she will certainly be missed. It won't be easy to get used to the fact that you can no longer call her up for advice, or to hear about what was going on in her life. I want you to know that as you move through the grief of bidding her farewell, you will be in our prayers. We will pray that the promise of the Gospel stays strong for you, and that you will be able to entrust her to God's care. We will pray that the hurt that your hearts feel today will eventually be healed, and that you will be able to remember with fondness the time you had together. And we will pray that your own faith, and your own relationship with God, will allow you to look forward to that day when you will be reunited with her.

### **A Gift from Saint Peter Lutheran Church**

We have a group in our church that calls themselves "Pray and Crochet." Every week they get together and make these wonderful blankets and shawls. They are gifts, designed to be shared by our congregation with people who are in need. As they make these gifts, they pray for those who will receive them – that just as a blanket or shawl covers you and comforts you, so too the prayers of God's faithful people will cover you and comfort you, and remind you of the hope and joy that is ours in Christ. They have asked me to present these gifts to Bertha's children, Verna and Edwina and Ron, on behalf of our congregation, and as a reminder of the love and prayers that we offer you. I hope that these gifts will remind you of how much we care about you, of how we hold you in our prayers, and of our confidence that even through the pain of bidding farewell to one you have loved so much, the grace of God will be your comfort, your strength, your hope and your joy. God has called you by name. You too belong to God. So do not fear, but live in the strength of this promise.

God bless you, friends. May the peace of God that passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. And may the faith that sustained Bertha sustain you, to the end of your lives and beyond.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor  
August 26, 2009

## First Lesson: Isaiah 43:1-3a

But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.<sup>i</sup>

## Second Lesson: Micah 6:6-8

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?<sup>ii</sup>

Epistle: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:51-57

Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Isaiah 43:1-3a, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>ii</sup> Micah 6:6-8, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

<sup>iii</sup> 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 15:51-57, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).