

Louise Brown
An Example of Faith in Jesus Christ the Risen Lord
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Introduction

We are gathered here in memory of Louise Brown. Let me begin this meditation by emphasizing something very obvious: the funeral service is for the living. It is for us. It is for our profit. There is value in gathering like this. It has been appropriately said, "Our present gathering will be without profit unless it awakens serious reflections and strengthens all of us for the future." To ask this of you is just what Louise would want me to do. She heard me preach many funeral messages, and she liked the two questions that I ask. These are like two hooks on which to hang our thoughts: about her: "who was she?" and of ourselves: "who am I?" Let's consider each in order.

1A. First we must ask, "Who was she?"

We can answer this question with a sketch and try to fill it out with some details. In a sketch and broadly speaking, she was Louise Brown, born Dec 20, 1915 and died March 1, 2010. She was a physical therapist, teacher, and a wonderful wife, mother, and grandmother. Preceded in death by her husband John and her daughter JoAnn, she will be sorely missed by her five children, eleven grandchildren, and seven great-grandchildren.

If we overview her life in a few words, here are some appropriate ones: sweet tempered, kind, and accommodating. Kindness is something that characterized everything that I saw in her life as her pastor for many years.

My wife captures a picture of Louise when she speaks of her as "the most 'unold' (older) person I have ever known. She did not repeat herself or merely talk about herself. She did not monopolize a conversation. On the other hand, she was a good and patient listener; she showed discernment in the give and take of discussion."

There is an example of this ability to listen with discernment in how she got along with a young man who gave her a ride to church on a regular basis. His name is Danian; he was in his early 30's and she was in her early 80's. He speaks of some apprehension leading up to their first long ride together to church in these words: "I have to say that the thing that impressed me most about her (given our age difference) was how she was able to relate to me. I had assumed that my life and the things I was going through would be a mystery to her. I had also assumed that our conversations in the car would be filled with a lot of awkward silence. The first Sunday I picked her up we had...a good 45 minute drive. About 10 minutes into the drive, she asked me if I had a girlfriend; I did not. She then gave me a complement [that] someday I will make some girl very happy. I then proceeded to tell her everything...about my love life. She was so genuine in her inquiry that I trusted her... I told her how I was ready to settle down and how badly I wanted to meet someone. She said something to me that I'll never forget (and this is very close to a quote), she asked me, 'Why are you so anxious? We girls are smarter than you think, we see right through that.' I was surprised; I did not expect a woman of her age to be able to size me up so quickly and so accurately. That day I made a friend and that 45 minute drive seemed like 10. Louise was a woman of wit and sagacity and I will always miss my conversations with her."

Louise was kind, quiet, and soft spoken, but she was not weak. After being her pastor for nearly four years, a set of circumstances arose in the church that caused me great heartache. A large number of people opposed my leadership. Things came to a head in a public meeting; many unkind words were directed my way; it was like being hit in the face by a barrage of rotten tomatoes. My emotions were sinking fast when little Louise stood up with Gail Blair at her side. With a soft spoken voice, she commanded the attention of the church. You could hear a pin drop as she read a letter that she wrote, a letter commending her pastor who had become her teacher pointing her to Christ. That took courage and conviction. The stand she took that day was an emotional embrace in her arms; she shared her strength with me; she stopped me from sinking any further emotionally. There was a little gray-haired elderly lady that towered over the elders of the church with her Christ-like love, loyalty, and dignity. I have forgotten all the bad stuff of that day, but I will never forget the kind, quiet, and soft spoken strength of Louise Brown.

So, she had a serious side and depth of conviction. We had many talks about theology, the Book of Romans in the New Testament, the sovereignty of God, the doctrines of grace, the reformers and the reformed faith; yes, predestination and providence, as we have in Romans 8.28: for God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to his purpose. She could dig deep to know God better and she could do so without losing the practical bearing of God's word on daily life.

Anyone who knew Louise knew that she had a sense of humor along with deep conviction. She enjoyed a good laugh and enjoyed causing others to laugh (or smile) by the witty way she played with words. Perhaps classic is the calm of heart that she displayed when she wittily replied to a nurse who said that because of the pneumonia she needs to cough; they need to get her "coughin." After the nurse left, Louise said her daughter Wendy, "I hope they get that spelling right about my coffin."

She could find a laugh; I never heard her complain. No doubt she did complain, but I never heard her complain, not really. In one of my last conversations with her, she was in the hospital in July (I think) of 2009. You may know that since then, she was in a very weakened state and not giving or receiving communication (very little if any for many months). So I am glad for that conversation. I said to her, "by your voice, you sound good." She replied, "and I look good too." Then she said, "I do not like to complain, but to tell the truth this is a hard time; it is just one of those things." Knowing her and from previous conversations, by "just one of those things" she was saying that this is one of the things that we have to expect as we get up there in age. She went on to tell me that the nurses have kicked some family members out of her room: "they count heads you know," she said.

The mention of family made me think of the family of God, the family of the redeemed. So, I proceeded to remind her of things things she knew about the city of God in glory, the rest that believers are promised in heaven, and the nature of that rest as eternal Sabbath rest. Can you guess what she said in reply? I dare say it may surprise many of you because her reply, though brief, showed a remarkable presence of mind, strong faith, and positive hope. With those hints, can you begin to guess? Well, she said these breath-taking words: "I am looking forward." She wasn't looking back in regret of a life now gone. She wasn't looking out at the suffering that now overtook her. She was looking forward to the city of God, to the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. I could not help but smile on my end of the phone. Smiling, I continued to remind her of the teaching of Scripture about the resurrection of the body, the heavenly city, the true Canaan, and the promised land of glory. I then said, "yes, Louise, we have the city in front of us...you are on your way to eternal Sabbath rest in glory."

After she moved up north, we would have some talks like that on the phone. In a particular way, I recall her vivid descriptions of what she would see and hear when walking in good weather. She said she loved to hear the birds, see the flowers, and watch the bees. She spoke of these things with praise and thanksgiving to God her Creator and Redeemer.

When she moved north, she never forgot the church she left behind. She liked reading my sermons, so, it was in her mind to continue to read them if we would send them to her. Connie, one of the ladies of the church, would send the sermons to her at regular intervals. Louise always expressed appreciation for them to me. In fact, if too much time passed between mailings, she would give me a gentle reminder. I think that that is why she would send an annual gift to the church, every December like clock work. It amazed me when she told me that she was down to reading with one eye, but that did not prevent her from reading the sermons. As you can imagine, this would be a joy to any pastor's heart to know that one of God's lambs was helped along in her journey by his preaching.

That is a rough sketch and we cannot completely fill it in; all of you have your memories of Louise. I have mine. It was a special to learn that she wanted me to speak at her funeral. I understand some of why she wanted me to do this. At times, she had difficulty expressing some of her deepest thoughts and beliefs. She wanted me to unpack some of what she believed and wanted you all, especially, family members to believe, to embrace as your own as she had done.

So who was Louise Brown? We have some of the answer.

I really think that if you want an answer to the question, "who was she?" (And this is a good time to ask such a question) you have to take in her acknowledgement of faith in Christ and His resurrection. You have to think about her as a sinner-saint. Some of you may question that she was a sinner (if so, you have too low a view of sin and death as its consequence; you do not see sin as she saw it) and some of you may question that she was a saint (if so, you have too low a view of God's grace).

There are many ways to answer that question (who was she?). I have answered it briefly by referring you to things that she did, things she pondered, said, and things she believed. She was a sinner. No hiding that fact. But she was a sinner-saint because she was a sinner saved by grace. She knew about the consequences of sin: sickness, aging, dying, and death. She believed in Christ and His resurrection. I don't think that you can understand Louise unless you see her in this way as a sinner trusting in Christ even though she suffered. We know who she was when we see her as a lost lamb that received grace in her suffering. We know who she was when we see her as an example of someone with faith, that is, faith in Jesus Christ the risen Lord.

As we read earlier in Ps. 103, Louise withered like the grass and the flower that flourishes then falls: she is gone and her place knows her no more. She has gone through the door of death to meet her Maker. We commit her into her Father's hands. Now in death, and here in this place, she is a person who has a final word for us all, a word about life and death. This brings us to the "who am I" question.

2A. Now we should hang some thoughts on the second hook: "Who am I?"

This is also a good question to ask of yourself and this is a good time to ask it.

You can answer this question by a summary of the entire Bible in a single sentence. That is quite a thought and you may ask, "Can a summary of the *entire* Bible be given in a single sentence?" Here is the summary: "I am a person created in the image of God, I have fallen from that image, and I need restoration in the image of God; I need Jesus Christ the risen Lord." That summarizes the Biblical message from beginning to end.

To be God's image means to be a reflection of His glory. This is man's dignity by creation. However, we have all sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Thus it is written, **"For you are dust and to dust you shall return"** (Gen. 3:19); you are but dust and ashes (Gen. 18:27). Therefore, when you ask this "who am I?" question of yourself, you ought to say, "You know what I need; I need Jesus Christ the risen Lord. I need Him more than I need food because is the bread of life by His death for sinners and His resurrection to give them life.

Louise knew these things and she knew the promise of Jesus of rest of soul: **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** ²⁹ **Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.** ³⁰ **For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light** (Mat 11:28-30). True faith means learning from Jesus as your teacher; it means clinging to Him as your priest for forgiveness, and it means learning how to live under His authority as your king. All three of these things define a true Christian; do not think of yourself as a Christian without them: without learning, trusting, and living under His absolute authority over you.

Therefore, Scripture says, **if you believe in your heart and confess with your mouth that Jesus Christ is the risen Lord, you will be saved** (Rom. 10:9-10) because **"Christ is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep"** (1 Cor. 15:20). The death of believers is called sleep because death for a Christian is a temporary state; it is like putting a child to sleep at night with the words, "I'll see you in the morning." Louise has "fallen asleep" and by faith in Christ, we can say: "By grace, Louise, we will see you on resurrection morning."

So, family and friends let me speak to you about the final testimony of Louise Brown. She was a sinner, a lamb who received grace in her suffering. Now, in her death, she continues as a testimony to you of your need of Jesus Christ. So, don't leave God out your life; don't simply travel this journey on your own terms, going your own way. Submit yourselves to Jesus Christ the risen Lord to live under His authority and for His glory. May this testimony of a sinner-saint pierce your hearts and give you rest of soul. May you look at the birds, flowers, bees that surround you along the road by Spider Lake and see there the beauty of Christ. Then, may the meditations of your hearts and the words of your mouths be pleasing in His sight.

May we fall down before the majesty of the great God and Father of the Lord Jesus Christ; may the Holy Spirit teach us about our sin, the consequences of sin in sickness, aging, dying, and death. May He enable us to trust in Jesus Christ the risen Lord as our prophet, priest, and king. To Him be all glory, now and forevermore, amen.