

Grace to a Suffering Lamb
Funeral of Lola Z. Stanley
WestminsterReformedChurch.org
Pastor Ostella
12-22-2008

Memoriam by Lola's sorority sisters

Lola spent many years doing charitable work through her sorority; her sorority sisters whom she loved dearly and who dearly loved her are going to begin our service with a memoriam.

Poem requested by Lola's husband Bill

Her nephew, my son Adam Ostella will read Emily Dickinson's "Because I could not stop for death." While he reads, consider this thought: too often, we are just too busy, even too busy to die...but death comes; importantly, now we can pause and reflect on death and immortality.

**Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.**

**We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –**

**We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –**

**Or rather – He passed us –
The Dews drew quivering and chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –**

**We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –**

**Since then – 'tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity –**

Scripture reading (of a text with special meaning for Lola)

Hebrews 4:14-16, ¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Prayer

Our Father in heaven we come to you in the name of our great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God; we thank you that we have the privilege of knowing you as "Father" because of the work that Jesus did to bring wandering prodigals back home. This is a time of need, we ask that you will enable us to draw near with confidence to the throne of grace to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. We ask for your blessing on the family: that you will be pleased to bless Bill, Kellie, Kim, Larry, Jackie, and Johnny. We ask these things for all who are present and we ask in Jesus name, amen.

Singing of "great is the mystery"

The tune of the hymn we are about to sing (and its 1st stanza) comes from "Angels we have heard on high." The 2nd and 3rd stanzas are based on 1 Timothy 3.16, **Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He (Jesus) was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.**

Background: last Christmas Lola and Bill were with us in Michigan; we sang this edited version of "Angels we have heard on high" around the dinner table and Lola participated with us. For many reasons, this is an appropriate hymn for us to sing at this time.

Great is the Mystery of Godliness

1. Shepherds, why this jubilee?
Why your joyous strains prolong?
What the gladsome tidings be?
Which inspire your heavenly song?

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

2. Manifested in the flesh
Vindicated by our God
Now adore on bended knee
Christ the Lord ascended King

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

3. Seen by angels on the earth
Nations heard a glad refrain
In the world He was believed
into glory taken now

Gloria in excelsis Deo
Gloria in excelsis Deo

Introduction

We are gathered here in memory of Lola Stanley. Let me begin this message by emphasizing something very obvious. We need to remember that the funeral service is for the living. It is for us. It is for our profit. There is value in gathering like this for these few brief moments. So I ask you to take this opportunity to gain the profit that can be yours in this time. As we have just heard from the sorority sisters, "Our present gathering will be without profit unless it awakens serious reflections and strengthens all of us for the future." To ask this is just what Lola would want us to do because she thought much about others instead of herself. So, for our benefit at this time, we can ask and answer two questions. They will be like two hooks on a wall in Lola's house on which to hang our thoughts: "who was she?" and "who am I?" Let's consider each in order.

Who Was She?

We can answer this question with a sketch and then fill in some details. We will start with some things that she did (this is a view of her outwardly); then we will consider who she was inwardly.

Sketch

In a sketch and broadly speaking, she was Lola Z. Stanley, born December 3, 1942 and died December 18, 2008. She was the daughter of Bernice Parker-King; raised by Bernice and Ted King Sr. She worked in health insurance for over 30 years.

She had many roles. She was a wife, mother, sister, cousin, aunt, friend, neighbor, volunteer specialist (most of you know of her charity work with her sorority sisters for juveniles with arthritis). And of course, she had the role of grandmother: affectionately known as Grammy; this was a matter of dedication, being like her Grandma Nellie. Those of you from her sorority know how difficult it was for her just last Christmas making cheese balls to sell for charity; she did much of the heavy lifting to spare some of you here today from that lifting. She visited us in Michigan with her back hurting from the lifting. And some of you may know that within this last year, she completed training to be a hospice volunteer (to visit people dying at home).

If we overview her life in a few words, here are some appropriate ones: tireless, hard working, and kind. The other day Bill used two words: "boundless energy."

Kindness is something that characterized everything that I saw in her life as a brother-in-law. She was kind to her sister, to me, my sons, and our grandsons. A few months ago, though discernibly weak, she noted my discomfort with poison ivy, got up from trying to rest, found some medication, came to where I was sitting and sprayed my arms giving me some relief. When in the hospital in October, she told my wife more than once: "give me the phone, so you can sleep." Moreover, she was truly appreciative of the littlest thing you might do for her (always ready with a thank you). Kind people tend to have a special gift of appreciation for kindness when they receive it. She deeply appreciated Bill's care for her during many extremely rough spots in this battle with cancer.

Lola was kind, but she was not weak. By her manner, she could wrap you around her little finger and you would find yourself volunteering to do whatever for her. With Lola, you didn't mistake kindness for weakness; she had a disdain for quarrelling, even strong healthy debate, but she was not weak. She worked hard at work, around the house, and in the yard with flowers and shrubs. She loved feeding the birds especially finches, chickadees, and humming birds but she became a mortal enemy of the chipmunks. Trying "to do them in," she got some but they keep migrating.

Tireless and hard working that was Lola, truly.

At the hospital one evening Bill, Kim and I talked about some qualities of Lola as doer and worker around the home. Bill told a "toaster" story. One Saturday there was no toast with breakfast. Lola said, "Check the toaster Bill; it needs to be fixed." Bill said, "I looked at it about a minute and reported back: buy a new one, it can't be fixed." Then Bill went on: "The next Saturday we had toast with breakfast. So I said, 'did you buy a new one?' Lola replied, "No I fixed it."

I then told them about the time last summer when Bill and I were working in the yard and I had the assignment of trying to trim the hedges with the electric trimmer. I was having difficulty operating the thing and Lola was there watching. She got up from her wheel chair and took the trimmer from my hands and held it up to demonstrate to me how to run it. I can still picture this little frail person holding up this good sized piece of equipment and shaking like someone pulling the trigger on a large machine gun. And she said, "This is how you keep it going."

Anyone who knew Lola knew that she had a sense of humor; she always laughed at Bill's jokes and stories. Often she would say, "O Bill." One memory that I have of Lola is hearing her laugh (as a cousin mentioned yesterday: you would know she was present in a room by her laugh). Last July 4th Lola wanted to go to see a fire works display in downtown Carmel...never mind the oxygen, never mind the ileostomy. So Bill took us. It was supposed to begin at 9.00. We were there early. We waited and watched the sky while various fireworks were going off hear and there around the city off in the distance. By 9.15, no big

event occurred as yet. Looking at the sky, I said, "how are we going to know when it's over?" This caught Lola's funny bone: she just roared, repeating the question a number of times that evening and even later. She would laugh and have fun with the question: how do we know when it is over if we can't find the beginning? That is a happy memory. It is good to remember.

She could find a laugh; I never heard her complain. No doubt she did complain, but I never heard her complain. In October, Lola had a bad night. She got up weak and weary. As the day progressed she ate some lunch and received a unit of hydration intravenously (at home). Soon after getting hooked up it became apparent that somehow the cord of the tube from her arm to the top of the pole ran through the sleeve of her robe, so, her robe hung there next to the hydration bag. I think it came about this way: to hook up the bag to the pick in her arm they rolled up her sleeve. A short time later, she took off the robe; then getting up, found it hanging on the cord, so, they hung it on the pole next to the bag. Everyone stared at the robe with puzzlement (how will we untangle this?), and then Bill unhooked the bag and slid it through the sleeve freeing the robe. At that point Lola spoke up with a wry smile and said, "I'm sure glad I didn't have to climb through that hole in the sleeve." We all roared at what would have to be the laugh of the day in the midst of frailty and weakness.

Last month, looking for some important papers, I found the certificate of my marriage to Miss Patricia Raye King at Summerside, Ohio. At the bottom were the signatures of the witnesses where I found the words "Mrs. Lola Stanley." I sat there with tears filling my eyes. I thought "as long as Patti and I have been married, Lola has been there." All the memories flowed together in a tear drop in my eye; how much more for her sister, Patti, who said, "as long as I have been here in this world, my precious sister Lola has been there; she has been there looking out for me." And how much more still has she been there for Bill, Kim, Kellie, Jackie, and Johnny.

Details

That is a rough sketch and we cannot completely fill it in; all of you have your memories of Lola. I have mine. It was a special moment a few months ago when she asked me to speak at her funeral. I understand some of why she wanted me to do this. As a private person, she had difficulty expressing some of her deepest thoughts and beliefs. She wanted me to unpack some of what she packed into single words like the word "confidence." So, I will fill in the sketch by looking beyond the outside to the inner person of the heart. These are glimpses and they follow some of the steps in her spiritual journey; each step will provide a (small) window to the inside.

1) Step one: Don't talk to me about the R word

Lola and Patti were sisters of the best kind: sisters with love for each other in a special self-sacrificing way. Lola took spankings for her sister and her brother Ted too; she was a loving sister and she was like a mother to Patti and Ted. The idea of step sister was not even an option; it was not a point of reference. However, one thing stirred up her dander as she put it this way to

her sister: "I do not want to talk about religion (the R word); keep that to yourself."

Lola responded accordingly when she heard me teach a few years ago. She sat in the back row; I went through the biblical teaching from the book of Hebrews on the need of Christ as a sacrifice, because we are sinners. Her reaction was edgy during the class and afterward she expressed the sentiment that it is hard for her to believe that people are sinners; that was difficult to swallow.

2) Step two: there is no one there

Lola had a favorite place to nap: on the back porch where she could hear the constant bird chatter and singing. The back porch is where her sister Patti asked a pointed question; it was two Octobers ago, near Patti's birthday. Perhaps with a little extra boldness toward her older sister, Patti asked Lola this question: "looking here at the trees, flowers, and birds with all the beauty that abounds, do you believe that it all just came about by chance, that it all just happened and has no ultimate meaning? Lola, do you believe in God and the afterlife?"

Lola stiffened in her chair and leaned forward to speak in a very deliberate way. She said, "No I do not believe in God or in the afterlife." Of course, this was troubling to Patti (and they talked for a while). So, before returning to Michigan, she wrote Lola a note going over their conversation. Coming back home, and for her birthday, my wife was able to fly out to Oklahoma City to visit Adam and Amy and our grandson, Caleb. I mention this as background for step three.

3) Step three: Shifting into reverse

While Patti was in OKC, Lola tried a number of times to reach her. I had missed her calls on our regular phone and after a couple of days I heard Patti's cell. I was too late to get it; best I could decipher, Lola had called. Then she called the land line number, and I answered it. Hi, Rich, (it was not Richard or rich but ri ich as two syllables) she said: "Is Patti there I have been trying for a number of days to reach her; I have something to say to her." I told Lola that she was in OKC and gave her the number. Before hanging up she mentioned to me that she had been listening to my sermons on Matthew. She said she would listen to some of my sermons on her CD player; she would listen as she drove to Ball State to see her granddaughter. She said, "I like to hear your voice." I think that when she listened at home my sermons helped her sleep. On another occasion, out of nowhere she said, "Rich, on one of your CDs, I heard you sing with Patti; she did well, but Rich, don't give up your day job." I replied, "I am wounded." After a bit, she told me she was just kidding and that she listened to my sermons because she found them "interesting and just right as to length." Now there is an encouragement for a pastor.

Later, my wife told me about Lola's call to OKC. She had it in her heart to tell her about a change in direction, a reversal. She said, "Patti, I do not know what got into me in our conversation on the back porch, but I want to tell you that I do believe in God and in the afterlife."

She quietly took an interest in the teachings of the Bible and in the teaching of Jesus on record in the book of Matthew and even the book of Hebrews where the word confidence occurs: (Hebrews 4:14 - 5:1 ¹⁴ Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need).

4) Step four: silence

One morning at breakfast, Lola wanted to talk about her funeral arrangements and in the course of things we talked about dying and death. I made the point that death is not natural but the consequence of sin. As Scripture says, ¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned (Rom. 5.12), and all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3.23). I quoted from the book of Hebrews: it is appointed unto man once to die and after that the judgment. When I got to the judgment, she turned her head slowly toward me, looked me directly in the eyes, and stared for a moment in silence; it was a questioning penetrating look. Then, she got up and said "we have to get ready for the nurse that is coming soon."

5) Step five: confession

Weeks ago Lola and I had an evening conversation. Bill had gone to a comedy show; Patti was sleeping near Lola on the couch; Lola and I were watching the news.

I asked her if she read my email yet (from a month ago); she said, "No, as a matter of fact, it just got fixed, I need to read a number of emails."

I left the room for a few minutes wishing she had read the email in which I had expressed concern for her. When I came back, I barely got into the room and I heard her voice from other side the couch; I couldn't see her but I could hear her. As I walked toward her, she began to explain how busy she has been (being sick), and that so much is going on with the clinic, chemo, nurse visits and visitors that she had not listened to her music or my sermons for a while now. Then she said these words that stick in my mind: "I appreciate the research you do for me to point me to things that give me confidence."

I found that Lola would pack a lot into a single word. Her use of the word confidence opened the door to discuss the passage in Hebrews on confidence to come to the throne of God to receive help in time of need (Hebrews 4.14-16: ¹⁴ ...we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God... ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need). So, I covered some ground we had covered before. I explained that we can come to God with confidence because of the place of Christ as the mediator between God and man ...because He suffered the punishment that we ought to endure for our sins. There is a barrier and the Lord Jesus is the way to get past it to God. We talked further about Christ as the great priest, mediator, and advocate that we need because of sin. Then I quoted

this verse to her that she was familiar with from the Gospel of Matthew. Jesus said: **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (11.28-30).**

This led to some discussion of sin and the fact that that death is a consequence of sin.

We talked about hope as far more than wishing; it is anticipation and expectation based on tasting a meal before you sit down to eat it. I connected hope to the resurrection of Christ as the first fruits. His resurrection is the taste of what resurrection day will be like and His resurrection is the guarantee of the resurrection of his people (1 Corinthians 15:21-58 ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ...I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² 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 shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." ⁵⁵ "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain).

In between these things, we discussed family histories: she asked about my dad and I told some stories about my grandparents and the Ostella's in the State of Washington that I never knew existed. Lola said, "It is sad that your boys did not have involved grand parents." She cited her lack of relationship with her step-father's side of the family. She spoke about living for a time with Grandma Nellie, with her sister, Patti, sleeping in a dresser drawer. She said "Patti is a wonderful sister and I love her dearly; she is such a great caregiver; she gives more time to me than I gave to my mom when she was dying. But during that time, even though mom was not a very loveable person, she took me back when she said to me 'I love you Lola.'" Listening I surmised that it had been a long time since her mom spoke like that, a long time indeed.

In between, we also made a plan on how to tighten and caulk the bathroom sink.

Then, I took the memory of her mother's words as a point to make for her children. "You remember this word from your mom years later. Just think of what words you can give to Kim and Kelly as a lasting memory if you have hope; if you are prepared to die."

She said "I told Patti of my hope when she was with Amy in OKC."

I said, "There is a difference between believing in God and believing in Christ and His resurrection." I quoted Rom. 10:9-10: **if you believe in your heart that Jesus was raised from the dead and confess with your mouth that he is Lord you will be saved.** She was nodding in affirmation as I quoted the passage, and she sat up and leaned forward on the couch and said "I believe in Christ and His

resurrection." I smiled and replied: "Lola that is so encouraging to hear and that would be an encouragement to Patti to hear...and that would be a good word for your children to hear." Then she said, "I am ready, I am prepared to die; I just do not want to go now." I said, "of course, I understand." She then got up and washed a couple of dishes in the sink.

So who was Lola Stanley? 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) 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, 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 believed in Christ and His resurrection. I don't think that you can understand Lola 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. That is why the title of this message is "Grace to a suffering lamb."

Who am I?

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). Therefore, when I ask this "who am I?" question of myself, and when you ask it of yourself, we ought to say, "You know what I need; I need Jesus Christ the risen Lord." I need Him more than food for He is the bread of life.

Jesus promises rest of soul: **Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.** ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30).

Therefore, He 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.” Lola has “fallen asleep” and by faith in Christ, we can say: “By grace, Lola, we will see you on resurrection morning.”

So, family and friends let me speak to you about the final testimony of Lola Stanley. 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 may you look at the humming birds, trees, and flowers that surround you and see there the beauty of Christ.

There is good news here (gospel); so let us sing again the text of 1 Timothy 3.16 **Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.**