

*Sermon for the Christian Burial of Vera Irene Britt, ★14.viii.1939 †3.viii.2005  
Saint Luke Evangelical Lutheran Church / New Bridgeville, Pennsylvania  
15.viii.2005, 19.00, Order for Burial of the Dead with Holy Communion  
Romans 8:31-39; Revelation 21:1-4; John 14:1-3*

*J. J. !*

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our crucified and risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ! ✠ Amen.

*"In my Father's house are many rooms."*

*-- John 14:2a*

I neither knew nor ever met Vera Irene Britt, but her son has shown me pictures of a little girl who once looked just as his own daughter does today, of a bright and beautiful young woman in a graduation gown who was valedictorian of her high school class, of a young mother trying to raise two boys. I know that her name, Vera Irene, means 'truth' and 'peace,' and I know that she is my friend's mother, your pastor's mother and, therefore, in a certain way, the mother of your congregation as it is has been served and led by him for several years now and, I hope and pray, for many yet to come.

And I know, or at least consider very likely, something else. That is that, though we are all gathered here for a funeral, though we

see the veiled urn with the ashes of the deceased right before our eyes, for those who were and are closest to her in this life, those for whom she does not cease to be a person they love in death, the reality of her passing has probably not really begun to register, not as it will over the next days, weeks and months, over the holidays and anniversaries to come. We are here for you today, Pastor, for you and for your whole family, but we also want to be there for you then, in those hard and empty times that may come, just as you and your dear partner in marriage and ministry have been for so many of us in time of crisis and sorrow.

In the Gospel reading we have just heard, the full impact of the impending death of Jesus has finally hit home among His Disciples. He has been trying to prepare them for this for three whole years, but they finally realize that He is not speaking metaphorically, that His sayings about the Cross are not just another parable, but that He is really going to die, on a Roman Cross.

Jesus addresses their real fear, the fear not only that they will lose Him but that they, His followers, will be lost to God, that they will no longer have a place in God's presence. They have

experienced that presence in Jesus. They have seen the power of God's love in His compassion and in His courage in the face of hypocrisy. They have heard God's voice in His teaching. They have witnessed the joy of God's Kingdom coming in the lives of ordinary people through His wonders of healing, forgiveness and fellowship. They have found themselves rescued from mortal danger by His unexpected intervention at sea. They have even performed wonders of teaching and healing on their own, under His commission, empowered by His Spirit. They have given up their homes and their way of life for Him. *He* has become their home. What will they do when He is gone? Where will they go? What or who will they be? They were afraid of becoming homeless in the universe if the presence of God, Immanuel, were taken away from them.

Jesus speaks of His 'Father's House.' At the very beginning of John's Gospel, Jesus overturns the tables of the money changers to cleanse that House, to reform it as what He called "*my* Father's House" and "a House of prayer for *all* nations." That is, His 'Father's House' was the Temple in Jerusalem, with its forecourt and inner court and the inner sanctuary of the Holy of Holies. But, a little

earlier than this text in John, Jesus teaches that His very own body will be the living Temple of God from now on. When He speaks now of His 'Father's House,' Our Lord is speaking of Himself, of His very own person.

In Him they will *all* have a dwelling place in God. By the bond of faith and righteous Discipleship they *already* live in Him, where there are '*many dwelling places,*' or '*rooms.*' In just a few hours from the time Jesus speaks to the Disciples here, the world will have no more room for Him. He will be shown hospitality one last time, in an upper room where He can share one last supper with His friends. Then, under no roof at all, He will be arrested and then dragged from that garden from room to room, for interrogation, for torture, for trial, until, finally, the only place on earth left for Him is the Cross.

Though few, if any of us, will suffer violent persecution for our faith in Christ, many of us experience what it means in life to move from house to house, some of us from state to state or country to country, in the midst of life, perhaps with the sense that this moving around, this constant change of our place in the world is rather interesting, seemingly without limit, but wondering where it

will all lead. Or, even if we have lived and continue to live where our family has lived for generations, in the same place, perhaps even in the same house, scarcity of resources, illness or injury may cause the rooms of our life to diminish in number and in size, fewer perhaps as we move into simpler dwellings that require less cost and less care, smaller perhaps, too, as small as a suite in assisted living or a semi-private room in a nursing home, as small as a hospital room for many of us, as for Vera Irene Britt. Who are we, where are we and where is God when there is no more room for us on this earth?

The One for Whose Blessed Mother there was no room to give birth, except among the farm animals, the One for Whom there was finally no room on this earth except on the hill of Golgotha, is with us in that hour in which there is finally no room left for us, as He was also present in Vera Irene's last hour. But He passes through that hour, the gate of death, so that He may take us also beyond it, to His own heart, where there is room enough for all and room for each one of us. Vera Irene, who moved so many times in her life, perhaps often uncertain of what the next move would bring, of whether there would be room for her here or there for very long, lived also in that

other space of God's love that is without limit, and she bore the name of Him in Whose sacred heart she always had had a home. God grant that, as she now discovers the truth of the hope she held by faith, she will also inherit the peace of that truth without let or hindrance from anything in the dwellings of this world she has left behind. ✠Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus Our Lord. ✠ Amen.

***S. D. G. !***