

Ivar Henrickson Memorial
October 16, 2010

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33

Psalm 121

Romans 8:31-35, 37-39

Matthew 11:28-30

I.N.I.

I feel kind of stuck between grief and praise. I am sorry that I did not know Ivar longer or better. I saw in him a great pillar of Bethesda, a kind wisdom bearer, an example of faithfulness in many things. He had lived a long full life, staying until the end of one company closing and transitioning into another for many years until retirement. He surely had an adventure in his stint as an airplane bomber in the Air Force. He surely felt proud to get an honorary bachelor's degree from the University of New Haven, because there was no such animal back in the day in the school that became University of New Haven. But he was taken away in such a violent way, an awful car accident. And there are others that were involved in that accident last Sunday for whom we pray who are alive, but hurt. Lord, have mercy on them, and us.

Today we gather to give thanks to God for claiming Ivar in the washing waters of baptism. Ivar, God's child, landed with his family here at Bethesda and stayed here, through confirmation, through his courtship with Betty, into marriage, after children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. Ivar, the true tenor with the sweet high-pitched voice, was content to remain faithful here at Bethesda through a lifetime of grief and praise. And so we at Ivar's death sing in the midst of lament and praise:

O God our help in ages past, our hope for years to come, still be our guard while troubles last, and our eternal home.

Here we get a glimpse of God's faithfulness in the love we find in the company we keep. Could Ivar's kind smile, his secure place at Bethesda be a window into the steadfast love of God? Could we imagine God's smiling on us and Ivar as we are here, leaning into one another's arms, eager to hear a word of promise from holy writ, chewing on bread and drinking wine to bring Christ inside of us?

We don't always know where life will take us. We won't perhaps know just how it is that Ivar lost control of the car. Terrible things happen that threaten to destroy our sense of what's right in the world, loss of a job, a relationship abruptly ended, wars, and change itself.

In the history of God's place in the world, the refrain we heard rehearsed in the scriptures and underlined for us today that nothing can separate us from God's love. You make the list of what could, as St. Paul did, and say can my error separate, can this calamity tear God away, can Ivar's death put God far away, and the answer is no! Nothing can separate us. God's Spirit, breathed into us through our baptisms, in our own receptivity to God grace coming new every morning, is as close as the person sitting next to us right now.

In Matthew 11, people who have been observing Jesus wonder who he could be. John the Baptist sends his representatives to ask Jesus, and Jesus speaks about the wonders he has done.

Jesus offers his own lament, which is that not everyone gets it. He says in poetic words, “we played the flute for you and you did not dance, we wailed and you did not mourn.”

Jesus wants to be very clear that he came to be close to the little things of this world and this life. And he offers the invitation for us to come close to him, taking on his yoke. Jesus in this moment wants to lift us out of our grief and share his own life, his own cross, his own death, his own resurrection, so that we do not have to bear our own alone.

It is good to have company, to help us, to comfort us, to share with use, to cry, and to sing. Jesus is surely here with us now between lament and praise, leading us with Ivar to heaven’s doors, to the heavenly choir, and the kind and gentle smile of God.

I.N.I.