

The Light shines in the Darkness
John 1:1-5
Christ Presbyterian, Edina

Katherine Olson funeral
October 31, 2007
Pastor Tom Koelln

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. John 1:1-5

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

To all who have gathered here to honor Katherine Olson and support her family, I greet you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. We should not be here today. We should be out and about, doing our business, enjoying this final mild weather before a Minnesota winter begins. And Katherine Olson should be with us, enjoying life as she always has. However, last Thursday evil reared its ugly head and Katherine is no longer with us. In a violent and malicious manner, in a way no one else ought to have to go through, she has left this life and this world and us. We are here today to grieve and mourn; some of us are angry and at times full of rage, trying to make sense of what is senseless, trying to comprehend what is incomprehensible. Some of us are very sad and confused, trying to figure out how such an event as her death could have happened. All of us are here to comfort and be comforted, and ultimately to say our final goodbyes to Katherine—a dear daughter, a dear sister, a dear friend.

Yet it is still important that we are here as we comfort this family by what we do and by what we say. Dear friends, not everything that happens is the will of God. God did not take Katherine's life. God did not need another angel in heaven. God did not take Katherine home because her work was done. Do not say that her violent and senseless death was what God wanted. That would be unfair to God and to the Olson family. We do not believe in a cruel and capricious God. We do not believe in a god who arbitrarily hurls thunderbolts from heaven and innocent people die. Rather what happened last Thursday was the work of evil, undisguised, uncensored, unmasked evil. Whatever caused that trigger to be pulled and the bullet to fire, was the work of the Evil One, not the work of God. And darkness rolled over and covered the family and friends of Katherine Olson when we received the news of her death.

In our Lutheran tradition this last Sunday was Reformation Sunday, a time when we remember what the great church reformer, Martin Luther, began nearly 500 years ago. The opening song at our Sunday worship was Luther's "A Mighty Fortress is our God." I began to sing the song, but then I couldn't anymore as my anger and sadness concerning Katherine's death overwhelmed me. So I just stared at the pages through my tears and read Luther's lyrics as the congregation sang. "The old satanic foe Has sworn to work us woe! With craft and dreadful might He arms himself to fight. On earth he has no equal." I thought to myself that the "old satanic foe," the Evil One, has taken another life. That Evil One has again worked his woe on us. Darkness seems to have won another round. The world seems a little less light.

Yet as a Christian I cannot stay there, I cannot say that the Evil One has the last word, because evil does not. In the Bible, in John's gospel, those first five verses that I read for you say it all. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Even before the world was created, the power of God's word existed and this Word is Jesus. And even though Jesus walked on this earth 2000 years ago, "that life was the light of all people" and that life was the light for Katherine as well. Into the midst of this broken world God came to be with us in a very personal way in Jesus. Like the light of a candle entering a dark room, John describes what it was like for Jesus to enter our world when he says: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." Jesus' life and death and resurrection put the lie to the power of evil. The light shining in the darkness exposes how impotent evil ultimately is.

However, as we gather here today the ugly face of evil still leers back at us through Katherine's death. Impotent though it may be in the end, the Evil One's power is still beyond our strength in the here and now. Martin Luther recognized evil's present power but also saw its future demise in the third verse of his great hymn. I remember reading these words through my tears. "Though hordes of devils fill the land All threat'ning to devour us, We tremble not, unmoved we stand; They cannot overpower us. Let this world's tyrant rage; In battle we'll engage! His might is doomed to fail; God's judgment must prevail! One little word subdues him.

It is to that "little word" that we cling today, the little word of Jesus saying, "Enough." Enough, Evil One, enough. Your power is limited and you will never have the last word."

We may never know the why of Katherine's death. We may never know the motivation behind the events of last Thursday to lure some unsuspecting, caring, and trusting individual like Katherine. We may never know why there had to be a violent and senseless death. But what we do know is we have a God who was the first to cry for Katherine and the first to welcome her home.

While she lived Katherine was bathed in the light of Jesus Christ and his resurrection, shining in the darkness. And though evil and darkness touched and enveloped her temporarily last Thursday, she remains bathed in the eternal light of Christ. It is Jesus who has the final word on Katherine's life because even in our present darkness, the light of Christ knows no limits.

To all who have gathered here to honor Katherine Olson and support her family, our presence here this afternoon is evidence that evil does not have the last word. Rather, the light of Jesus shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not and will not overcome the light.

Amen