Funeral Sermon for Geneva M. (Weeks) Bennett  
January 26, 2011  

“A Firm Confidence”

7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:3-8).

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you through our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

The basis for today’s sermon comes from those few words from St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy, where he writes, 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing (2 Timothy 4:3-8).

With these words, St. Paul writes to Timothy, his spiritual son in the faith (i.e. 1 Timothy 1:2). St. Paul the Apostle knew that his death was approaching. He recognized that his days were numbered (Psalm 90:12). He knew that he could not escape his own death, but with confidence, he wrote to Timothy of what he was sure.

In confidence, he declared, 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

From where had St. Paul the Apostle obtained such confidence? From where had St. Paul, even in the midst of facing his own death, such certainty that he was able to face death head on, positive of the crown of righteousness awaiting him, positive that he had kept the faith, sure that he had finished the race, and in unwavering faith declare, I have fought the good fight?

From where had St. Paul such resolve, such boldness, and even such boasting of what was and what would be?

Such confidence, boldness, certainty, resolve, and boasting on Paul’s part he did not have because of who he was.

In one place, he says, This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief (1 Timothy 1:15).

In another, Paul writes, We know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do (Romans 7:14-15).
And just following these words, Paul continues and says, I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells (Romans 7:18). Then he writes, O wretched man that I am! (Romans 7:24).

St. Paul was a sinner. He would die. His heart would stop. His breathing would cease. The effects of Adam and Eve’s fall in the garden would certainly befall him. He could do nothing to escape this cold hard truth. Sin and death would have their way in the world. Of this he was aware.

And yet, even in the midst of this truth, even in the midst of such solemn gravity and burden, St. Paul the apostle yet had peace. He still had hope. He boldly asserted his confidence.

Such things Paul had, not because he was a sinner, though he truly was, but because of His Savior, the very one whom he preached and proclaimed, Christ crucified (1 Corinthians 1:23).

Though Paul confessed himself to be chief of sinners, sold under sin, a doer of what he hated to do, and even a wretched man, Paul also believed and confessed in Him who would deliver him from his body of death.

Thus was Paul able to say, I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Romans 7:25).

Paul had no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:3). His certainty of the crown of righteousness to come was not in him doing the right things, saying the right things, living the right way, being good enough, loving neighbor enough, or even loving God enough. His sole confidence, peace, and hope, was Jesus Christ—and Jesus Christ alone.

For Paul, and for all believers in Christ Jesus, the Word and the Work of God’s only begotten Son is everything. Jesus is the “Solid rock” upon which we stand (LSB 575/576). Jesus Christ her Lord is “The Church’s One Foundation” (LSB 644).

The Word of Jesus declares your sins forgiven. The Work of Jesus means your salvation, For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:22).

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:18-21).

Adam brought sin into the world. And with sin, there is death.

But Christ Jesus, by His perfect obedience to God’s perfect Law in your stead and by His sacrificial death in your place, gives to you eternal life. Because Christ has satisfied God’s demands on you and suffered the Father’s wrath and punishment against all sin, you now have
peace with God. Therefore, in Christ, not even death can separate you from God’s love (Romans 8:35-39), for Jesus is risen from the dead, dead no more!

Such is God’s way, that He forgives the sinner and freely gives eternal life to those who deserve eternal death, without any merit or worthiness in you, but because of Jesus Christ.

**By grace you are being saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast** (Ephesians 2:8-9).

All who seek salvation outside of Christ will not find it, but only have God’s judgment on them, for Jesus Christ alone is The Way, The Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Him (John 14:6).

But all who seek God’s mercy in Christ truly do have it. And having Christ, we have confidence, and hope, and even joy, even in the face of death, whether it be our own or that of another.

Jesus has indeed overcome the world (John 16:33). By means of His shed blood, Jesus atoned for all of your sins. None remain. Therefore, you have every reason not to fear God, nor to fear suffering, nor to fear death, for Christ has conquered death and lives, and in Him, so do you.

But on this side of heaven, where we still struggle with our sin, where we suffer grief and sorrow, and where we wrestle with ourselves, one thing is certain, and here our confidence is sure: God’s love for you—in Jesus!

Be sure of this, and heaven is opened. And then you can say with the Paul the Apostle,\(^7\) **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.** 8 **Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day…**

This to you will be able to say, not because of you, but because of Jesus. If your confidence is you, it will not waver and not at all stand. But if your confidence is Christ, it doubtless will.

For this reason, on this day, we not only grieve Geneva’s death, but we give thanks to God for the faith in Jesus Christ which He gave to her, for washing her with the water and Word of Holy Baptism, for strengthening her and preserving her in the true faith through Christ’s very body and blood given in the Sacrament of the Altar, and for feeding her with His Holy Word unto life everlasting.

Geneva demonstrated such a confident faith. Though she was not at all perfect, and a sinner, she believed in Jesus and had a desire to serve the Lord. She wanted everyone to know about Jesus and to believe in Him as Savior. She confessed His Name and did not deny His gifts, but believed them to be her own.

She was ready to depart and to be with the Lord. A number of times, she clearly and with candor said, “I’m ready.” She was so sure of what was to be…kind of like St. Paul the Apostle.
Geneva was no apostle like Paul, but she certainly was a child of God, baptized into His Holy Name, confessing her Lord, seeking forgiveness, and trusting in Him who died to save her from her sins and who now lives forevermore.

Jesus was her confidence. And the crown of righteousness of which St. Paul spoke is also now to be Geneva’s on That Day, not because of her, but because of Christ, and only because of Christ.

And not only hers, but also yours who have loved Christ’s appearing.

Such also is our confidence—because of Christ. In Christ, you have peace. In Christ, you have hope. In Christ, you have confidence and know that God’s Word and promises are true.

Though it is true that we grieve and sorrow as we live in this world. it is also true that we do not sorrow as others do who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Amen.