

Amber Sue Wilson

June 5, 2009

INTRODUCTION

Family, friends, members of the community, within the healing embrace of God's love we have gathered here to remember the life of Amber Sue Wilson, and to entrust her to God's eternal care, knowing that God's good purpose for his people cannot be defeated by death nor sin. We are all children of God, and in the faith that God has given us, we turn to the Lord now asking for his comfort and grace to be upon us, and to dwell in a special way upon Loretta, forever Amber's mother, Ken, forever Amber's father, and Jacob, forever Amber's brother, upon Grandmas Peg and Sue, Grandpa Ray, uncles, aunts, friends, and all those who were privileged to know and love Amber.

SENTENCES

Hear the promises of God. "Fear not, for I am with you, be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious hand."

HYMN Pilgrim Hymnal #363

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

WORDS OF CONSOLATION AND PRAYER

Listen to these words from the Holy Bible, words written by the Apostle Paul as he considered the perils of human life, the sorrows that too often overcome it, and within these, the love of God as revealed in and through Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior, who died on the cross that we might live, and rose from the dead that we might never die.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be

able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“LET US BOW OUR HEADS IN PRAYER. Compassionate and loving God, comfort us in our sorrow, strengthen us with hope, and breathe peace into torn and troubled hearts. Assure us that the love we have for Amber is not in vain—indeed make it a part of the store of goodness you are even now pouring out upon her in your eternal kingdom. Help us to bless you for the gift you gave us in her, for the joy she gave all who knew her, for the memories that will abide forever, and for the assurance that she lives forever in the joy and peace of your presence. Guide us through this time of heart-breaking sadness with the light of your love and the strength of your compassion; we ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

I would like to share with you three readings. The first is taken from the Gospel according to Matthew in the 18th chapter. “At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, ‘Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.’ Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.”

God’s profound love for his children, our children comes to mind when Jesus tells us that not only do our children have an angel, but they have angels who look upon God continually, and are constantly singing the praises of these little souls. Christ’s love is so tender for these little ones because he knows how difficult and dangerous life can be for children and parents physically and spiritually. We ought to call to mind

then this tenderness, this absolute, eternal, real love, when we talk about God and how God “takes” a child, takes a child’s life, from his parents. Now I know this is said to bring comfort by expressing the belief that God has a higher purpose for our child, a heavenly destiny, and therefore God took her or him to fulfill it. But the spiritual and Christian fact is that not a day goes by on earth that our children don’t have a divine destiny placed upon them by God. Scripture says our Father in heaven doesn’t will that one of these little ones be lost to him spiritually; and just as this is true so it is also true that our Father in heaven doesn’t will that one of our little ones be lost to us physically.

So if God doesn’t take our children from us, why does this happen? Tragedies happen because this is a big world—and we are quite small. Now our love for our children feels as big as this world, as big as the cosmos. Who can witness the birth of a daughter or son and not have the doors of heaven open revealing to us that the nature of our being is love, love for this new, tiny, helpless baby? When such an experience births us to our true destiny as creatures made in God’s image, as creatures who love, then we truly know that nothing but this child matters any longer, not even our own physical existence. We would do anything, everything to protect, preserve, and care for her or him. And so we whisper in their ears what our hearts tell us about what they mean to us and what we will do for them. We tell them our love will be powerful, resilient, protective, and always there for them. And it’s true. Our love is, and was, and will be forever. But here’s the thing: Our love is, but our love isn’t that strong, not in this world. It is strong, but then again it isn’t. Is it?

We love but our children still get boo-boos and need band-aids, or at least think they do. We love but they still get broken bones, the flu, or cancer. We love but our children still get called names or made fun of. We love but they still get rejected by someone they wanted to date. Christ loved, but he was still crucified. God loves but still must wait until we turn to him. Why does this happen? Because the world is a big place, and we are small, even with our love; even with our love that’s as big as the world, as big as the cosmos, things happen, sad, sad, tragic and terrible things happen.

But even or especially when such things happen, God goodness and love protects and guides us, with special messages, with family, friends, churches, prayers. God doesn't abandon us, but sees us through.

There is another question that continues to be raised. How did this happen? What happened? If it weren't enough for a mom to lose her beloved daughter, Loretta has also had to face this question. Loretta knows that you who are here, know her, love her and support her in this terrible and tragic time. What I say now is not for you but to Boca Raton and others who have had the misfortune of being misguided.

It is natural to assume that the car, the Ford Escape was left running. We have all been forgetful, done something stupid that could have been dangerous or might have even turned tragic. And when it didn't, we thanked God. But this time we can't. The first word out in the news reports was that Loretta told police she couldn't get the key out and so just left the car running inside the garage, went naively, negligently, (insanely) on her way into the house, closed the door, and did nothing further. The police have recanted this statement. Loretta never said this. But they have said again and again that the keys were found on the kitchen counter, and this is true. So there are only two possibilities then: Loretta forgot to turn off the car when she and the girls went inside but came back later and turned it off, putting the keys on the counter. Or, she turned off the car, like she has tens of thousands of times, pulled the key out of the ignition, the fan kept blowing, which it normally does so she couldn't hear anything but the fan and the picking up of goody bags and the girls talking, went inside with the girls, and put the keys on the counter. The tragic problem is that the car kept running, emitting carbon monoxide in an unventilated garage.

If someone thinks the first one is the obvious and right one, it has to be remembered that if this is true Loretta would have had to go out into a garage so filled with exhaust and carbon monoxide that when she turned off the car so that no more carbon monoxide was further emitted and went back inside the house there would have been enough already emitted that later on it would almost kill her, and cause the two girls to in fact perish. On top of this, she would have had to go into that garage, and come out without feeling enough effects of the poison to alert her to the fact that she had been poisoned and she needed to do something about ventilating everything, but still have enough poison in the air in

the garage and in the large house already to cause the tragedy it did. But I'll make it even simpler. Loretta would have had to remember at least a couple of hours later for there to be enough build up in that garage and also the house, go into that garage with all that car exhaust stinking it up, and then whether effected or not leave it without ever opening the garage door to air it out, even though she knew the car had been running for several hours. That I guarantee would not and did not happen. Loretta is an engineer. The first reaction any of us would have had after opening the door from the house to the garage and smelling exhaust would have been to hit the garage door button and lift the door.

If you Google the sentence "Car still running after turned off and key removed from ignition," you will receive the first ten responses of 143,000 responses in 0.24 seconds, at least on my computer. This whole "car still running after turned off and key removed from ignition" thing happens in BMWs, in Hondas, and in Fords. It happens across the spectrum of cars. Here is the first entry from WikiAnswers: Q: "Car still running after turned off and key removed from ignition?" In: Honda Accord EX A: "The throttle may be jammed. If the car has been unused for a period of time make sure that the throttle mechanisms are well lubricated." Like it's fairly normal. Actually, it is not the throttle that most mechanics talk about in their answer as to how a car can keep running after the key is out. They talk about the ignition switch. And if you look up Ford Escapes you will find a significant number of complaints about the ignition switch.

When I first saw Loretta after Sunday morning, she said she couldn't understand how this could happen. She said couldn't make sense of it because she knew she took the keys out of the car. What she knew we now know. We know, Loretta. We know.

Our second reading is like the first, from chapter 19 of Matthew. "Then little children were being brought to (Jesus) in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.' And he laid his hands on them and went on his way."

Jesus blesses the children and then must go on his way. He knows he will return to bless them eternally, to have them in his kingdom's care forever. But for now, he gives them to us, to a mom's love, a dad's love.

It is our love given to our child for as long as that child, that person, is with us that is our gift and responsibility. Some of our children live but hours, or days, weeks, years; others live to full-grown but still pass away before their mom or dad is through caring for them. When Christ receives our child again, to bless her again but this time to keep for us, our caring is complete, our responsibility fulfilled. Of course our loving isn't. That never ends. Christ continues to care for your beloved, while your love continues until you rise to see your child, place Amber in your arms, laying your hands upon her, blessing her. Heaven's joy will glow even brighter that beautiful day when you are reunited.

The third reading comes from Isaiah and speaks of the time when the God's kingdom is fully established on earth, of that time which is yet to come: "Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight. I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it a child that lives but a few days, or an old person who does not live out a lifetime; for one who dies at a hundred years will be thought a youth; and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed. They shall not labor in vain, or bear children for calamity; for they shall be offspring blessed by the Lord—and their descendants as well." Amen.

MUSIC

REMEMBRANCES

As we continue this service of remembering and of calling upon God to comfort us in our sorrow, I invite any of you who are present now to share thoughts and feelings you have regarding Amber that may help us to remember and encourage, especially Loretta and family.

SERMON

In the most beautiful gardens, even those tended by the most skillful horticulturists, there is an occasional rose that buds and begins to grow, but never fully opens. In all respects the rose is like all the others, but something keeps it from blooming. It fades away, disappears,

without having reached maturity. What happens in nature's garden happens once in a while also in the garden of God's human family. A baby is born and grows up into a child, beautiful, precious, but in too short of a time and without coming to the full maturity that we fully expected and so ardently desired for her, this child, like the bud that never fully blossoms, is gathered back into God's heavenly garden of souls, where all imperfections are made perfect; all injustices made right; all mysteries are explained; and all sorrows turned to happiness.

Today we mourn our loss of such a child, of two such children, of Amber and her dear friend Caitlyn. This is painful beyond words. I believe it is also painful to God. Amber was born August 18, 1997 to Loretta and Ken Wilson in Boca Raton. She grew up happy, secure, and loved. She became the best friend of many other children, and this year won the award at school for most trusted friend because she was so dependable and kind. Her brother Jacob loves her because she was helpful and nice to him. Amber's favorite activity, other than shopping for too many shoes, was to bake chocolate chip muffins, especially with Caitlyn, and then share them with family and friends. This quiet and kind girl with a radiant smile that lit up the room was a straight A student. This amazing and sweet child with beautiful brown eyes was as fearless as any tackle football playing boy, and probably more so. She'd ride any roller coaster she could get onto. Here before the entire church she made a stewardship speech and performed a puppet show with Katie Kollar that taught other children how to pray the Lord's prayer. She wasn't afraid of anything, except of course spiders and bugs, which had to be removed from her room or presence before she'd go to sleep, rightly so. This Amber Wilson, our Amber Wilson, this little one of God, was and will always be loved, remembered and missed.

All who lose a child face the difficult question of how to live again. So I want to say it clearly and directly: You, Loretta, Ken, Chris and Jill have the right to live, to live again. You have the right to mourn, to change, to be different, to be sad, to be crushed, to be happy again, to love again. Loretta and Ken, your angel, Amber, would want her mommy and daddy to live, love, to know she's in God's care, and that she can wait for her parents to come to her in God's time. Amber wants you to find a way to mourn her but to live again.

Whatever might be said that could ease the pain or assuage the grief that you feel, we would say it. There just isn't much we can say that will help. But we will express our profound sympathy and deep sorrow. We can offer words of love and care. We can write tributes about Amber and letters and emails to you. We can say we will pray for you, and continue to pray for you and your family. We can be by your side, and help you take your journey, and listen to you. We can hope for you that you will live again, in yours and God's time. We can tell you that you are loved, that we love you. We love you.

PRAYER

I would like us to bow our heads again. Heavenly Father, whose Son Jesus Christ took the children into his arms and blessed them; we thank you that you gave Amber to us, even though we had her for too short of a time; and we thank you that our hearts loved her so fully and deeply that the grief is now so powerful and painful. We praise and bless you for the assurance that the child who has been taken out of our sight is with you, that you have received her to yourself and you will keep her now and always, safe in your eternal care, with all suffering passed. O God, whose compassion never fails; we commend to you those who mourn, especially Loretta, Ken and Jacob, Jill, Chris, and Cassie, Phil, Madison, and Chandler. We remember too, Grandmas Peg and Sue, Grandpa Ray, aunt Kristina and Karen, uncles Bruce, Greg, Mike, and Patrick, cousins, all family members, friends, and this church who have been denied the joy of seeing Amber further blossom and grow in our midst. Grant to all who weep today, your strength, upholding them in a living hope. May the words of Jesus, which reveal his love for little children, speak peace to our troubled hearts. This we ask in his name, who taught us to pray, saying,

OUR FATHER WHO ART IN HEAVEN, HALLOWED BE THY NAME; THY KINGDOM COME, THY WILL BE DONE, ON EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN. GIVE US THIS DAY OUR DAILY BREAD; AND FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS, AS WE FORGIVE OUR DEBTORS; AND LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION, BUT DELIVER US FROM EVIL. FOR THINE IS THE KINGDOM AND THE POWER AND THE GLORY, FOREVER. AMEN

COMMENDATION

As Christians, it is our conviction that our loved ones move on into the nearer presence of God, where they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water; and God himself will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

Having this faith, O God, we now commend into your hands, your servant Amber Sue Wilson. Acknowledge, we humbly pray, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, and a daughter of your own redeeming. Receive her into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the company of the saints and angels in light now and forevermore. Amen.

God's peace is hers. God's peace be yours. Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

HYMN: Pilgrim Hymnal #77, (Vss. 1 & 3) Be Still, My Soul

BENEDICTION: Go now in peace, and may the blessings of God Almighty, Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit rest upon you and remain with you all, both now and forevermore. Amen

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