"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."

Sometimes we are at a loss of words when a person dies. We don't know exactly what to say. We don't want to say the wrong thing and drive the bereaved to tears. So we are concerned about choosing the right words to say.

That is why we have gathered here today - to hear what God has to say. God always has the right words to say, no matter what the situation may be. Today he comes to us with his words of comfort. It is found in John's Gospel where we are reminded that JESUS HAS THE WORDS OF ETERNAL LIFE.

Words are powerful. The words of world leaders have the power to change the course of history. But one power is not found in the words of man. That is the power to change hearts and give the gift of everlasting life. That power belongs to the gospel alone and it is expressed in the words of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peter acknowledged that when he said to Jesus: You have the words of eternal life.

Just prior to reading, many former followers of Jesus had left him. They found the gospel message too hard to believe and so rejected it. They were happy to follow Jesus as long as he did not make any spiritual demands of them. But when Jesus looked for a confession of complete trust in him and in his work as the one way to everlasting life, they turned away. They were not ready to acknowledge that their salvation was entirely in the hands of God.

Yet that same message changed the hearts of the 12 disciples. God's Word worked a change in their hearts. They had found peace with God through the gospel. They could confidently say to Jesus, as Peter declare: You have the words of eternal life.

Jesus' words - the gospel message - have power to change hearts. They changed the hearts of the twelve. They changed the heart of Irma as well as all other believers.

When a person is born into the world, he is spiritually dead. This means he is outside God's kingdom until God works faith in his heart through the power of Gospel. That is how it was with Irma. Like the rest of us, she was born spiritually dead - outside of God's kingdom. But God brought her to faith and into his kingdom shortly after her birth when she was baptized. That faith continued to grow over the years as she was taught more about her Savior. That was evident when she publicly professed her faith in Jesus at her confirmation.

Irma knew Jesus was the only way to heaven. She knew and believed Jesus to be her Savior from sin. Her faith in Jesus continued to grow throughout her lifetime as she faithfully heard and read God's Word and received Holy Communion. She demonstrated her faith in a life of service to her Savior - whether it was as a Christian wife, teaching Sunday School, singing in the choir or all her baking. She stood firm in Jesus throughout her life and her death. Because of Jesus, she is saved eternally.

This was not something that Irma, let alone any of us, deserved. We are people who offend God with our sins. We sin everyday in our words, actions and thoughts. There is no way we can keep God's commands. And for that we deserve death - physical and eternal death.

But what we could not do, Jesus Christ did. Jesus is the sinless Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. His entire life was devoted to the service of his heavenly Father.
That service led him to the cross to be sacrificed as the spotless lamb of God for sinner. By his death we have been made holy through the forgiveness of sins. By his resurrection, his words of eternal life are made certain. That is why he can assure the believer: **Because I live, you also will live.** We have eternal life because of Jesus.

So often when we talk about **eternal life**, we think of it as something we will get when we die. That is not entirely true. Eternal life is something we have now. Think of familiar passage: **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.** Notice it does not say **will have**, but **have eternal life.** That is something we have now, although we do not enjoy it fully because of sin. But when God takes us to himself in heaven, then we will enjoy eternal life fully and perfectly. By God's grace, Irma is enjoying that eternal life perfectly and fully now with her Savior.

We look forward to the day when we will enjoy eternal life fully and perfectly in heaven. Don't look anywhere else for eternal life except in Jesus. He is the only answer for eternal life. There is no one else who has the words of eternal life.

But many think there is another or better way. They try out all different religions, teachings and philosophies. They try to find a way that makes life simpler and less complicated for them. But in the process, they leave Jesus. They think their works and actions will merit God's good favor and they will get into heaven by them. That does not work.

And we cannot stand by ourselves or on our own before God. Nobody but Jesus can satisfy our spiritual need. No one is able to supply what Jesus supplies. From Jesus' words, we experience new life with the Lord, the eternal life for which God had originally created man, interaction with our Lord and enjoyment of his unending blessings. How could we abandon that?

There is no other or better way. Only Jesus. He alone has the words of eternal life. And the reason for it: **He is the holy one of God.** Jesus is the eternal God in human flesh. He is the Holy one of God who came down from heaven in order to save us and set us free - set us free from sin, death, and everlasting damnation, so that we might be his forever.

That is the comfort and assurance Jesus gives us today. By God's grace, Irma knew and believed that the same God who led her to believe was faithful to all his promises. That meant Irma could live with the assurance that her sins were forgiven and with the certain hope of heaven. Jesus' words did not let her down.

Yes, words are powerful. But the gospel is **the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes.** It is that Word that assures us: **Be of good cheer, your sins are forgiven.** It is Jesus’ comforting words: **I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me will live, even though he dies and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.** Yes, those are the words of eternal life - which is our comfort and hope today. Because of that power of God, we, like Peter and Irma are able to say: **We believe and know.** May we all live in that confession and keep that confession now and for all eternity. Amen.

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