

„His faithfulness, not yours!” Rev 2:10

Today we are here because death has taken one more of our loved ones, our sister in Christ Stella Andretzke. For our meditation we have this verse from the book of Revelation: **“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”** This was also Stella’s Confirmation verse.

Stella was blessed with a long life and to be called in God’s nearer presence when you are 92 may seem like a natural order of things. But it is not! I guess it seems less fearful for people if they look at death as if it was normal. It is not!

In death one’s very existence is terminated, it takes away all that one has ever had, it takes away our loved ones, people who are the closest and the most important to us. There is nothing comforting or dignifying in death. It is violent and unnatural end of one’s life.

However, no one is protected from death and no one can escape it, there is nothing we can do. We know that it will come to all of us, we just don’t know when. Therefore it is such a blessing to be a Christian. **“Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.”**

“Be faithful and... I will give you...” If you are with Christ, if you are a member of His family, if you stick with Him, you know that death has no final say over you or your loved ones. You know that death has been defeated.

Even if it still reigns in this age, it has been denied of its ultimate power. Jesus Christ, our God and Redeemer has triumphed over death in His resurrection. And if you are united with Christ, then you are united with Him also in His resurrection.

As He rouse from the dead, He will also raise you and your loved ones. This is why Christian funerals are so unusual. On the one hand, we are saddened by the loss and separation from our loved ones. But on the other hand, there is joy and hope.

For we know that we will have our lives back, we know that we’ll see our loved ones again, that we’ll have our bodies back, our resurrected and perfect bodies to live in God’s presence, where there will be no more sin, no more pain, or death, or cold. We’ll triumph over death and this our triumph will be final.

„Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.” If we think about these word carefully, they actually are not that comforting, unless we understand them properly.

Be faithful unto death! Be faithful! Have you been faithful to Christ? Every one of you have been taught how to live properly, what is right and what is wrong. Many of you have been taught what it means to be faithful to Christ.

And many people actually try to live according to their best knowledge and abilities. But as you try to be faithful, you find that it is hard - you fail so often. You fall short

so often. If we depend on our faithfulness to receive life with Christ, we are in trouble.

The fact remains, we all fail, we constantly fail to be faithful, especially if measured according to God's standards. And at the end of the day His are the only standards that matter.

Stella was brought up in Christian family, she knew God's standards for our lives. She did as much as she could to be faithful, but as everyone else, she felt short. She wasn't perfect. She couldn't be faithful unto death. None of us can.

That's why it is so important to understand this verse properly. It is not what you do, that will grant you the crown of life, it is about whom you trust. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, your God and Saviour invites you to put your trust on Him.

He has proven to be faithful unto death. Even unto death on the cross. He has promised to take upon Himself the responsibility for your unfaithfulness and your sins. He has promised that if you trust Him and stick with Him, you will be in His Kingdom, to live and rejoice forever. It is not about you being perfect, it is about whom you trust.

Crowns are given to victors. Crowns of life are given to those who have conquered death. Stella will receive the crown of life. Not because of how she lived, not because she has conquered death, but because she trusted and was united with her Lord, Jesus Christ, the One who is the true victor over death.

I'm not sure how well Stella could hear or understand the promises of God here in the Divine Service during her last years, especially when her pastor has this funny accent. But she was here, where Christ Himself invited her to bless her.

She came to receive the body and blood of her Saviour Jesus Christ and together with it she received forgiveness, salvation and eternal life. She trusted that Christ is faithful and will give her what He has promised.

She knew that the crown of life awaits her, not because of her faithfulness, but because her Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ had promised it to her. She knew that He is faithful unto death and that He will keep His promise.

I pray today that the Holy Spirit would grant you all this trust, this firm hope and assurance that neither your attempts to be faithful, nor your failures, but the faithfulness of our Lord Jesus Christ will give you the crown of life. Just stick with Him. Trust in Him. He is faithful.

Amen.