



Louise Coffey Harvey

Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; John 14:1-7

Memorial Service, 26 July 2008

We gather here to celebrate the life of Louise Coffey Harvey. Louise lived a long, active life. Her days and years were filled with friends, family, country music, and bowling balls.

A life of 83 years covers many things. I did not have the privilege to know Louise. To the many who did know her, she was many different things. She was a sister, mother, wife, friend, grandmother, great grandmother, bowling partner, and other things besides. In one sense, that is what makes grief so difficult. Each individual grieves over a different aspect of the one who has passed out of our circle. The loss of a mother is different from that of a sister or bowling partner. The death of a grandmother is not the same as that of a friend.

We grieve for our own sense of loss. In reality, we grieve for ourselves. We can do nothing here to harm Louise, nor indeed to help her. She is beyond our reach. In that realization, it is for our own loss that grief comes to interrupt our lives and routines. There will be no more phone calls, bowling competitions, rides in the care, or visits with her. The opportunities for those things are irrevocably gone, so we must wrestle with any of those might-have-beens that will never be.

Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that there is time in life for many things. There is time for living and dying, rejoicing and grieving. There is time for remembering. As we consider Louise, those memories are likely filled with figurines of angels, unicorns, fairies, but especially bowling balls. There are those times spent with family and friends throughout Nelson County and along the Tye River. There are the national bowling competitions in Tucson, Niagara Falls, Florida, California, and even Washington State. There is the gold medal for bowling in the senior Olympics.

Then there are the memories of home cooked meals, often experiments that did not turn out quite as planned. There are the times she carried her children around to medical appointments, stitches, balls games, and even caring for two sons in the hospital at the same time. With the children at home, Louise was always there for them. She loved her grandchildren just as much, though never seeing them often enough to suit her.

Her home was full of memories. She packed them away like the newest bowling balls she was trying out. After living in one house for about half a century, there were many reminders of her life with family and friends for others to sort through. Louise kept up with her friends, taking both the Amherst and Nelson County papers to keep abreast of the goings on.

After a fall a couple of years ago, her physical condition took a setback. She fell doing what she loved, living life with the zest that others came to expect of her.

Louise liked her country music and drives in the car. She enjoyed going, doing, and enjoying life. She liked her find-a-word puzzles, always keeping several books of them on hand. She did not care for gossip. Her motto was, "If you can't say anything nice, don't say anything at all." When gossip was about her, she would respond with, "If they are talking about me, at least they are leaving someone else alone."

Louise was not overly religious, but attended Perkins Park Christian Church until it closed. She made sure the kids were always in Sunday School, though she might only would show up for the preaching service. You could always tell where her heart was. At home, she would watch Reverend Robert Schuller on TV. She would turn on the TV for Rev. Schuller, otherwise Golf, if that was not on, it was bowling. On one bowling trip out West, she had to stop by the Crystal Cathedral.

The writer of Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time for every aspect of living. There is a time to reflect on life as we have known it. That is what Ecclesiastes does, after all, reflecting on the experiences of a full life from the perspective of one like Solomon, who had it all. Most of those great experiences are fruitless and empty, he says: “Vanity among vanities.” By contrast, he makes a distinction at the end of the book. “Fear God and keep His commandments, for that is the whole duty of all.”

As Jesus spoke with the disciples at the close of His earthly ministry, He sought to offer words of condolence and encouragement. They were about to lose Jesus’ physical presence and their lives would be thrown into disarray. He chose to encourage them prior to His impending death. The problem was that they just did not understand Jesus’ words. They could not understand about things like life beyond death, how Messiah could die in order to enter into the long-awaited Messianic Reign. They could not grasp how they could know the way into an unknown.

So when we face death and grief, it is in the midst of a lack of understanding. There are so many things we want to know. There are so many things we fail to grasp. We do not know what things look like on the other side of death, for we have never been there. We must rather trust the words of Jesus that He is on the other side.

While here on earth we have the opportunity to experience life with all its varied opportunities. We have the chance to enjoy time with family, friends, bowling, and rides through the countryside. At some point, however, we must also pause to consider that other side of life. Jesus spoke of entering that life of the ages through believing in Him and His words. This belief is so much more than a rational acceptance of fact. It about depositing our confidence, our faith, and trust in Christ Jesus.

This is what the disciples were having trouble understanding. As they deposited their lives and their welfare in the hands of Christ Jesus, they could rest assured that He was on the other side, preparing a place for each of them. Jesus wanted the disciples with Him in eternity. Louise wanted her friends and family with her, too. That’s why she made sure her children were always in Sunday school.

“On the wings of a snow-white dove He sends His pure sweet love—a sign from above on the wings of a dove. When troubles surround us, when evils come, the body grows weak, the spirit grows numb when these things beset us He doesn't forget us. He sends down His love on the wings of a dove.”

Maybe there are more rides in that countryside to come. Maybe there are bowling tournaments yet to play. The message of Jesus is that death is not the final answer, after all. It is a farewell with the possibility of meeting again in Jesus’ heavenly realm.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*