**Introduction**

As a congregation we went for a while without a choir. Part of the secret of any congregation singing, or almost any choir, is that the blend of voices always sounds goods. But when we didn’t have a choir, I put a couple of notices in the bulletin for any “talent” that might want to sing or play something to please contact me. Marge immediately volunteered. And if I’m remembering right, her first piece she sang she had accompaniment. She had a wonderful voice and still had good pitch, but she was in her 80’s and voices that once were very strong lessen. So when she approached the next time I was happy, until I asked her if she had accompaniment. Firmly expecting that John Burrey or AJ were going helping. But Marge said, “no, she was going to do it acapella.”

My first thought was it is bad enough that I torture the congregation with my short chanting. I’m not sure if a full acapella anthem is a great idea. Of course I didn’t say that. I said, “wonderful, how about in 3 weeks?” And three weeks later Marge was singing. Her voice alone. And what came out I have to admit was maybe the most moving piece of artistry I’ve heard in church. Yes, Marge’s voice was not as loud as it used to be. Yes, the wind support was not as strong. And the perfect pitch would waver a bit more. But she had picked the perfect lyrics the blended with the voice she had that day.

I snuck a peek at Dale. Who in my experience was a relatively reserved man. A common Wisconsin midwestern trait. And what you could see on Dale’s face was that mixture of love and “that one is mine” when your spouse or son or daughter does something great.

Their deaths were contrary to the great litany request to be “spared a sudden and evil death.” But both Dale and Marge were completely comfortable with who they were and where they were heading. Which is far from something given these days.

**Gospel**

In some ways I feel like Dale might be getting the short stick today, because the hymns and this reflection on them, are all chosen by Marge. But the more I thought about it, it is very like their union. Marge was the talkative one. Dale would drive Marge to choir practice. Not singing himself, but he’d often just sit listening. Or when I’d visit, he’d nod along with what Marge was saying.

So I want to meditate for a few moments on the final message Marge prepared for us with her hymn choices.

Thine Forever, God of Love. Thine forever, oh how blest/they who Find in thee their rest/savior guardian heavenly friend/o defend us to the end. And a sceptic might snicker their earthly end, when was your guardian, but Marge would quickly remind us that this life is not the end. That we entrust our souls to Christ. That the blest find their rest in him. That we whatever age are but frail and trembling sheep, but we are always beneath his care. And always in his goodness share. Our sins have been forgiven. And the LORD shall lead us from earth to heaven.

And what should such love inspire? Now Thank We All Our God. It’s the great Thanksgiving hymn. With hearts and hands and voices. With Marge the emphasis might have largely been on voices. I think with Dale is was hearts. But from our mother’s arms we have always been blessed. If we sat down to count the grace, the providence of God through our lives, we could not count them all. And that providence is unique and eternal and still ours today. Whether we are firmly in the arms of grace, or current perplexed, the good shepherd guides us. And frees us from ills. In this world, and the next.

And her final hymn choice is something we so often forfeit. Whether we forfeit it in doubt that He cares. Or is worry that what perplexes us is too small. Or in pride that we should be able to take care of ourselves. There is a never ending list of sins that attempt to separate us from Christ. But Jesus is the sinner’s friend. And we can carry everything to God in prayer. In his arms he’ll take and shield thee. Thou wilt find a solace there.

**Conclusion**

Dale and Marge have that solace right now. They see by sight. We still walk by faith. But we all still share the same solace. The God of Love, the sinner’s friend, our friend – Has defeated death. We may be separated for a time. The church still militant in the midst of trials and temptation. The church at rest from their labors, but still asking how long? That church, that communion of saints, shares the same hope. Christ has defeated death, and the resurrection day approaches. When militant and at rest become the Church triumphant. And we all sing together the victors strain. Amen.