

## **Good Friday**

**A Sermon by Pastor John W. Bengston  
Augustana Lutheran Church  
Denver, Colorado  
April 10, 2009**

Gertrude Baines made the news last Tuesday, even gaining a spot on The Today Show. She was shown celebrating her birthday – her 115<sup>th</sup> birthday, the world's oldest living person. The Los Angeles Times reported that plaques, certificates and flowers were presented to the longtime Western Convalescent Hospital resident from high-ranking politicians, including Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sen. Dianne Feinstein. But it was a cooler packed with one of her all-time favorite treat – Dodger dogs – that got her most excited. She enjoys watching the LA Dodgers on TV.

Born in Shellman, Georgia, she has lived in southern California for some time and lived on her own until she was 105. The former maid outlived everyone one of her relatives, including her daughter who died of typhoid at the age of 18. When Gertrude Baines was born, Grover Cleveland was president and the U. S. flag had only 44 stars.

What a record. 115 years old – actually 115 years and four days today. She received lots of attention for at the age of 115, she is still alive. A new goal for all of us to shot for!

We all want to live long, active, able, and health-filled lives. The fastest growing segment of our country's population is the over 85 group. Many people achieve long lived status. Sadness covers us when someone dies prematurely.

That's why we're here. We gather this evening to observe the death of a 33 year old Jewish male from Nazareth. He died earlier in this day, many years ago, outside the city walls of Jerusalem. His death was by crucifixion and was accompanied by darkness, earthquake, and other unusual phenomena. The man, whose name was Jesus, was buried before sundown by Jewish tradition in the tomb of a man named Joseph from Arimathea.

In our lives today, we are enticed into avoiding all signs of the aging process which bring us closer to death. We can use creams to remove wrinkles, and if that doesn't work there is always surgery. If grey hair is not your thing, we have the choice of many different colors and shades. Teeth falling out? Just get a new set or perfect implants so you can bite into that apple and smile again with confidence. If you're running out of gas and your get up and go has gone up and went, there's Centrum Silver, Geritol, Ensure, Viagra, or Cealis. It's as if we can deny loss, deterioration and death itself.

(over)

On Good Friday, Christians gather to intentionally face death, the death of Jesus of Nazareth. This article of faith is on our lips every Sunday: he was crucified, died, and was buried. This evening, we are called to contemplate this death, and its meaning for us. This is the one we call Savior; our sorrow is muted, for we know that Sunday is coming. Death is not the end, but death is real. His death was real. Jesus was not given drugs that made him appear dead. He did not lapse into unconsciousness to be revived. There was not some part of him that floated around ready to rejoin his body in three days. As the creed says and as Scripture declares, he was dead – all dead. On the cross He gave his life for the sin of the world, for my sin and yours.

Ah, holy Jesus, for the sheep is offered  
Thy death of anguish and thy bitter passion,  
For my salvation. (ELW #349)

Amen.