

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**The Funeral of Hazel Corrine Witkowski Pasqua
Proverbs 31, Luke 2**

**13 April 2023
Larson's Funeral Home, Fairfield, CT**

“Woman of Strength, Woman of God”

I selected two readings for today, one from the 31st chapter of Proverbs 31 titled “Ode to a Woman of Strength”, and one from the 2nd chapter of the gospel of Luke.

Now I'm sure that when I read the passage from Proverbs you heard some things which reminded you of Hazel, but I want to go through those verses again and show you how they line up with the words written specifically about Hazel in her obituary. It's actually pretty amazing. It's almost as if the writer of Proverbs knew Hazel.

In the scripture passage we read,

¹⁰ A woman of strength who can find? She is far more precious than jewels.

¹⁷ She girds herself with strength and makes her arms strong....

²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, and she laughs at the time to come.

²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.

and in Hazel's obituary we read,

“Hazel was a skilled homemaker and devoted mother of 5 children who never seemed to tire. She kept the family home in order, tirelessly working daily to ensure that the kitchen floor was sparkling clean, every bed was made & each room as neat as a pin.”

In the scripture passage we read,

¹³ She ... works with willing hands.

and in her obituary we read,

“Hazel was very creative and enjoyed drawing, sewing and making small craft projects.”

In scripture,

²³ Her husband is known in the city gates, taking his seat among the elders of the land....

and in her obit,

“Her husband John was a World War II Veteran in the 83rd field artillery, who bravely served in the Normandy Invasion and the Battle of the Bulge.”

In scripture we hear that,

¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her, and he will have no lack of gain.

¹² She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.

and in her life,

“Hazel took care of the bookkeeping for her husband John's carpentry business.”

In scripture, ¹⁵ She ... provides food for her household

In life, “She was an excellent cook and always had dinner & dessert prepared and waiting for John & the family.”

In scripture the strong woman ^{15b}provides tasks for her female servants.
In Hazel's case, it wasn't servants but children for whom she provided tasks.

“She taught her daughters the art of homemaking
and the proper way to make a bed, fold towels and sheets
and also to iron clothing so that not a wrinkle could be seen!

Because of her creative influence,
each of her children developed their own talents in art & graphic design, music & crafts.”

In scripture the strong woman

²⁰ ...opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy....

And in her life,

“Hazel enjoyed meeting with her circle friends at Salem weekly,
where they created care packages for the needy.”

When I first read those verses in relation to Hazel, I was amazed at the correlation.

And then I realized, it's probably not a coincidence.

Because Hazel was such an avid Bible reader,

I would not at all be surprised to find out

that she had memorized this whole chapter and used it as a guide for her life.

Because that was what she did.

She didn't just read the Bible for the sake of reading the Bible.

She read it as a guide for her life, as a love-letter written to her by her divine Father,
with every bit of advice she would ever need.

I've known many people who have been in Bible study all their lives,

and they know their Bible and can quote from it,

For many of them it is just a history book, or a theology book,

or a philosophy book, or a self-help book,

but for Hazel it was a personal communication from God that influenced her life everyday.

For Hazel, it wasn't just about information but transformation.

She didn't read it so that she could know ABOUT God,

but so that she could KNOW God, himself.

Which brings me to the second reading I chose, the one from Luke 2.

I am pretty sure I have never heard this story used at a funeral before,

and I know I have never used it before in this way,

but that's because I've never known a “prophetess” before.

And to me, that is what Hazel was.

I was just going to read the part about Anna,

but when I read the part about Simeon I decided to include that as well – for 2 reasons.

First, Simeon's Song which in Latin is known as the Nunc Dimittis

was the song he sang when he knew he could leave this life in peace

because now his life's purpose was complete.

He sang,

²⁹ “God, now let your servant go in peace, according to your word,

³⁰ for my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

³² a light for revelation to the gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.”

Hazel held on just like Simeon did until she knew her life’s purpose was complete.

I read the part about Simeon, too, because of his words to Mary,

“a sword will pierce your own soul, too.”

Hazel knew what Mary felt, because like Mary she was predeceased by her beloved husband and by not just one of her children, but two.

But what I was really struck by was these words about Anna, which are also about Hazel.

The scripture says,

“She was of a great age, having lived with her husband 7 years after her marriage,

³⁷ then as a widow...

For Anna it was to the age of eighty-four, for Hazel the age of 98.

Then the scripture says,

She never left the temple – or in Hazel’s case, her bed –

but worshiped there with fasting and prayer night and day.

³⁸ and [she] began to praise God and prophesy about Jesus

to those who were looking for the saving of God’s home.

And this is the heart of what I want to share with you.

Hazel would always tell me about how much she loved God and depended on him, and how she felt him in her heart.

But the last time I saw her at home and prayed for her, she started praying for me & for Salem.

There are some people at Salem that want

to merge it with another congregation & move it out of Bridgeport, & maybe even close it, and that tears at my heart because I don’t believe that’s what God wants.

But after I prayed for Hazel, she began praying for me and for Salem,

and she ended her prayer with these words,

“And God, I just KNOW you have something exciting in store for Salem in Bridgeport,

and so I thank you for what you have done, what you are doing, and what you will do.”

That was when I knew I was listening to Hazel the Prophetess.

And it is that prophecy that gives me hope whenever I need it.

I close with these words from scripture addressed to Hazel,

²⁹ “Many women have done excellently, but you surpass them all.”

and with these words addressed to you, ³⁰ ...a woman who loves the LORD is to be praised.

and with this prayer to God,

³¹ Give her a share in the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the city gates.

Thanks be to God, for Hazel, the wife, the mother, the prophetess, and most of all, the lover of God. Amen