

Positively Speaking

By Mark Wilson

Whatever Comes

One day, after making a hospital visit in Duluth, I was drawn by the spire of the old First Presbyterian Church. A kind secretary opened up the sanctuary for me to sit and pray for a while. Gazing around, my eyes fell upon a beautiful stained glass window. It was the picture of a gravestone with dark purple and black hues overshadowing it, but at the top of the window, squarely in the center of a black night, shone a bright golden star -- which seemed to exude hope and light. The star was the focal point of the window. At the bottom, the following words were inscribed:

In memory of Sarah Agnes Graff
1853-1889

*Build a little fence of trust around today.
Fill the space with love and work and therein stay.
Look not through the sheltering bars upon tomorrow.
God will help thee bear whatever comes, of joy or sorrow.*

I wondered what the story was behind Sarah Agnes Graff -- who passed into eternity at the tender age of 36. What was it about her that inspired such a beautiful work of art? Upon some further investigation, I found that she and her family had moved from central Pennsylvania a few years before, and that her husband, Phillip, owned and operated a very successful lumber and interior furnishings company. The Graff's seemed blessed, indeed, with a lovely home, a thriving business, a good reputation in the community, and five beautiful, healthy children.

Tragedy, however, does not discriminate. It knocks at every door. Sarah fell ill with a high fever and severe abdominal pain. Before the doctors could find the cause or cure, she slipped into unconsciousness and died. She drew her last breath on November 20, the day before Thanksgiving.

I imagined Phillip, the heartbroken father, and his precious children: little Herbert, only five; and Agnes, age six, along with twelve year old Carroll, and the two teenage daughters, Anna and Margaret,, standing beside an open grave at Forest Hill Cemetery, on that cold, bleak November afternoon.

Rev. Ringland, their beloved minister, bowed his head and said:

Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God to take unto Himself the soul of our sister, Sarah, here departed, we therefore commit her body to the ground, earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

And then, the grieving family walked away together, with deep sorrow and a glimmer of hope to face uncertain days. I've heard it said that there are two things that pierce the human soul: beauty and anguish. The Sarah Graff window at First Presbyterian Church captures both.

"The people walking in darkness have seen a great light. on those living in the land of the shadow of death, a light has dawned."

(Isaiah 9:2) . . .

God will help thee bear whatever comes -- of joy or sorrow.