**FRIENDS FOREVER**

**For Marsha: Flowers While You Still Live**

“Friends are friends forever, if the Lord’s the Lord of them.”
– Michael W. Smith

It’s very early on Sunday morning as I sit here in my office thinking about my long time friend Marsha Gulsvig. As always, I come early on the Lord’s Day to prepare my heart and mind to worship God and reflect on the class and sermon that I might teach and preach, wanting to do my best for the Lord, and for the Lord’s people. But today was different. I couldn’t get my heart and mind to focus. The reason is because I’ve been thinking about and praying for my dear sister and friend Marsha. You see, today I’m to go to the Hospice Care facility where she has been taken to enter into “end of life” care. My heart is turned toward my friend this day, which has led me down memory lane on the past 35 years of our time together.

I wanted to give my friend flowers while she was still in this land of the dying, as she prepares to pass over into the land of the living. I want her to hear from me, and from God, what her life has meant to us.

First, from me.
There are friends, there is family, and then there are friends that become family. And then, best of all, there are forever friends who become a forever family. Marsha, you are one of those forever friends. Because of Jesus Christ we have become forever friends, a true BFF.

This morning as I was thinking of you I turned on my computer and looked on the internet for Michael W. Smith’s singing at the funeral service for his friend President George H. W. Bush at the National Cathedral on December 6, 2018. I wish I could sing like him, but I can’t, so I wish to read the lyrics, from my heart to yours:

Packing up the dreams God planted, In the fertile soil of you,
Can't believe the hopes He's granted, Means a chapter in your life is through,
But we'll keep you close as always, It won't even seem you've gone,
'Cause our hearts in big and small ways, Will keep the love that keeps us strong.

And friends are friends forever, If the Lord's the Lord of them,
And a friend will not say never, 'Cause the welcome will not end,
Though it's hard to let you go, In the Father's hands we know,
That a lifetime's not too long, To live as friends.

With the faith and love God's given, Springing from the hope we know,
We will pray the joy you'll live in, Is the strength that now you show,
But we'll keep you close as always, It won't even seem you've gone,
'Cause our hearts in big and small ways, Will keep the love that keeps us strong.

And friends are friends forever, If the Lord's the Lord of them,
And a friend will not say never, 'Cause the welcome will not end,
Though it's hard to let you go, In the Father's hands we know,
That a lifetime's not too long, To live as friends.

Now, hear from God.
The Bible speaks often of what true friendship looks like. It says things like, “*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends*” (Jn. 15:13). It says, *“For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!”* ([Eccl. 4:10](https://www.biblestudytools.com/ecclesiastes/4-10.html)). It says, *“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”* ([Prov. 17:17](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/17-17.html)). It says, *“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”* ([Prov. 18:24](https://www.biblestudytools.com/proverbs/18-24.html)). You have been all of those things to me and to others. For that I say “God bless you.”

David, a man after God’s heart, poured out that heart to his God these heart-piercing words during the darkest hours of his life in Psalm 116,

​1 I love the LORD, because He has heard My voice and my supplications.
2 Because He has inclined His ear to me, Therefore I will call upon Him as long as I live.
3 The pains of death surrounded me, And the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me; I found trouble and sorrow.
4 Then I called upon the name of the LORD: “O LORD, I implore You, deliver my soul!”
5 Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; Yes, our God is merciful.
6 The LORD preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me.
7 Return to your rest, O my soul, For the LORD has dealt bountifully with you.
8 For You have delivered my soul from death, My eyes from tears, And my feet from falling.
9 I will walk before the LORD In the land of the living.

12 What shall I render to the LORD For all His benefits toward me?
13 I will take up the cup of salvation, And call upon the name of the LORD.
14 I will pay my vows to the LORD now in the presence of all His people.
15 **Precious in the sight of the LORD Is the death of His saints**.

Paul reminds us that the sting of death will soon be behind you, and the defeat of Hades is right before you. “*O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?* His answer: *Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ*” (I Cor. 15). Indeed, “*Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints*.”

Marsha, it was the poet Rosalie Carter who wrote: “I think that God will never send, a gift so precious as a friend.” You have been God’s gift to me and so many others. Truly, friends are friends forever, if the Lord’s the lord of them… Though it's hard to let you go, In the Father's hands we know, That a lifetime's not too long, To live as friends.

I love you. – Rick, your BFF.