

Kate's smile ... the smile on her soul is even bigger today. You saw her smile at home, at work, talking about work. I don't know; did she smile on the softball field, did she smile when she was up to hit? Or did she put on her "don't mess with me" look? We saw her smile here at church; on Sunday mornings she'd come in with her coffee and a great big smile.

What do we know about smiles? Sometimes there's a bit of a rebel in our smiles. And sometimes there's some hurt behind our smiles. I saw a hint of that, a hint of hurt, when I asked Kate about her tattoo, the one on the cover of our service folder. Kate was back in the family corner over there. I think she was showing off her tattoo, so I asked her about it. With a big smile she explained: "God is greater than our highs and lows; God is greater than our ups and downs." Then she explained that she had it arranged so she could always see it, always be reminded. And with the thought of her lows, her down times, with the thought of needing that reminder in her down times, her smile faded a bit; it wasn't quite as bright.

Even for people with big, beautiful smiles, life isn't always easy. Some days it's a life event, like this last week. Some days it's the people. We all have people around us who hurt, and we hurt with them. We all have people around us who find some joy, some satisfaction in hurting us, and it hurts. And we all have ourselves - our worries, our fears, our failures; our shame and our guilt.

That's why it's great to remember "God is greater than our ups and downs; God is greater than our highs and lows." God is greater. God shows his greatness in the smile of a baby, the smile of a daughter, a sister, a friend. God shows his greatness in the smile of the stars in the sky. Some days we might wish God would show more of his greatness with smiles all around us and nothing but smiles all around. That day is coming; Kate already knows that day. We might wish that day were right here, right now, for us. But God especially shows his greatness in this - in the smile and the tears of Jesus - **"who loved me and gave himself for me."**

Those last words - **“who loved me and gave himself for me”** - those words come from Kate’s favorite Bible verse. At Shoreland Lutheran High School, part of the graduation tradition is that the graduates pick a favorite Bible verse to be read as they cross the stage to receive their diplomas. Kate chose Galatians 2:20 - **“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. [In other words, life isn’t about me; life is about Jesus!] The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”** Paul wasn’t just talking about himself; Jesus had that same life and love for Kate, and he has that same life and love for me and for you.

Now, when Paul said that Jesus loved him and Kate and you and me, he wasn’t just saying that Jesus has tender feelings for us. When Paul said that Jesus gave himself for him and for Kate and for you and me, he wasn’t just saying that Jesus lives to do nice things for us. No, Kate knew that Jesus didn’t just do nice things for her, he gave himself, he sacrificed himself for her and for you and for me. That’s what the cross is about. Jesus sacrificed himself to pay for the way that we have crossed God - whether it’s for the ways we smile at things we just shouldn’t smile at, or for the times we have destroyed someone’s else’s smile by saying something, doing something, mean, hateful, unkind. We’ve all done that, haven’t we? Jesus sacrificed himself; he put himself on the line to take God’s scowl, God’s anger, God’s judgment. Why? So we can see God’s smile.

God has a smile for Kate and for you. A smile that says: **“With Jesus, I love you. With Jesus, I forgive you. With Jesus, I’ve got you covered today and forever.”** That smile from God meant so much to Kate - peace, relief, happiness, hope - and a determination to show that smile - God’s smile and her smile - in the highs and lows, the ups and downs of life. Today Kate sees that smile, God’s smile, better than ever. And today, her smile is bigger than ever. Amen.