

***Celebration of the Life of
Robert Alan "Bob" Bruce***

February 21, 2008

I.

Many occasions in life draw us together. Sometimes we gather in joy and celebration, sometimes in sorrow and grief. Today we're here for both reasons. We're united in sorrow at the death of our friend and brother, Bob. But we're also here to remember and celebrate his life.

And to Lady Anne, Laurel, Alan, and the family, we want you all to know that our prayers are with you and our hearts go out to you. Bob was a fine Christian man, a loving husband, a caring father, a dedicated colleague, and a true friend. And because we loved him so much, the sense of loss is so deep. His passing leaves a large empty space in many lives.

So we sit here today feeling two kinds of emotions. One is a profound sadness because Bob's life ended before his work was complete. But the other is joyful hope because we know he has claimed the promise of eternal life. And because of our faith, we also can look without fear beyond the grave, and so I'm going to ask you all to sit back a little as we think about the Christian promise of eternity, and as we reflect on Bob and how he touched us all.

II.

We might begin by recognizing that our passage through this world is relatively brief when we consider the countless generations that have gone before. In the Book of James, our Lord's brother tells us that we "are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (4:14).

But our short time in this world is not a sorrowful thing, for we also know that this world is not really our home. Our life here is merely a time of preparation for a greater life to come. We just heard some readings from Scripture that described this Christian hope. And these readings are important not because they sound good or might reflect wishful thinking, but because they are true.

The reading from the Book of Wisdom told us that the righteous live forever, and that God will take care of them. The twenty third psalm is a lyrical statement of God's promise to us. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever." Paul's letter to the Corinthians proclaimed that our momentary afflictions prepare us for eternal glory. And in the Gospel of John we heard how Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven

So, while in this earthly life we all experience physical death, it really has no power over us. Death cannot hurt us because we merely leave this world for the greater glory of eternity. Death is not the closing of a door, but rather the opening of the heavenly gate. It's the beginning of the greatest and most wonderful adventure of all, actually returning to God.

III.

But even though we know Bob is with our Lord, we still grieve at times like this. We feel a loss because he no longer is with us. We miss him. We wish we could say just one more thing to him. But now he is beyond our touch, and we are beyond his, at least physically.

He has touched us, however, and his memory touches us still. He lit up our lives when he was here, and now that he is gone our memories of him seem to shine even brighter in our hearts.

And he will continue to touch us when we remember his care and concern for others, his love for his students, and how he shared his love of music with them. The ensemble that played before the service this morning consists of people who learned their first musical notes from

Bob. And many of you here today have studied and worked with him. I know you all treasure your memories of him.

Here at St. Thomas we grieve as well. Bob not only worshipped with us but he was responsible for the choir and all the music we sang and played. He was very good at what he did, and had a wonderful gentle touch in working with the choir and the rest of us. He encouraged people in the congregation to sing with gusto even though they couldn't carry a tune at all. It seemed like every Sunday I heard how much the people liked the music.

And Bob actually had a degree in banking and finance, but he went back to school so that he could do what God called him to do. He was trained and qualified to go out into the business world and make his mark. But that wasn't Bob. He wanted to help others, and he brought music and song into their lives, literally and figuratively.

IV.

So how do we cope with this? What do we do when a husband, a father, and a friend is struck down in the prime of his life? How do we, as Christians, explain how bad things can happen to good people?

That question probably rests in the back of all our minds. This isn't the way things are supposed to be. Parents are not supposed to bury their children. And children aren't supposed to grow into adults without their parents.

But we don't yet live in that glorious future that God has promised us. We still live in a broken and fallen world where tragedy occurs. Bad things do happen to good people. If only good things happened to good people, then God's kingdom already would be here, but we know that day is still to come.

So we continue to live in Christ as we wait for God's purpose on earth to be fulfilled. But until that time, our life in Christ does not automatically shelter us from sorrow and loss. And when we mourn, God mourns with us because he knows our hearts. He will help the tears to stop. He will help our grief to soften. And the future will be brighter than today.

A good measure of peoples' lives is what they left behind and how they are remembered. Bob will be laid to rest today, but he will be remembered always for his friendship, for the way he always put his family first, for the way he put others ahead of himself, and for the Christian example that he set.

IV.

We share our tears at parting from Bob, but we also look forward to the joy of meeting him again. And for Lady Anne, Laurel, Alan, and the family, we all pray that your grief can soon give way to thanksgiving for the wonderful times you had with him.

So, we grieve, but we grieve with hope. And with hope the grief we feel today will diminish and be replaced by the comfort of knowing that Bob is safe with our Lord, and that he is waiting there for us. *Amen.*