

***Celebration of the Life of
Andrew Jackson Boice, Jr.***

September 4, 2009

I.

This is a difficult and emotional time, isn't it? We're here to remember a man we loved, and to say good-bye to a friend and colleague.

And there are two sides to this day. Even though we have gathered in sorrow because of the death of our brother, Jack, we also come to celebrate his life. And to Nancy, and Gary, Dick, Janet, and to all the members of the family who loved him so much, we want you to know that our prayers are with you and our hearts go out to you. Jack's passing leaves a large empty space in many lives as well as here at St. Thomas.

So we sit here today in profound sadness because Jack's life in this world has ended. But we also are secure in our hope that his life in the next world has begun. And because of our faith, we know that we can look without fear beyond the grave to the promise of eternal life.

And so with that thought as a point of departure I'm going to ask us all to briefly consider the Christian promise of eternity as we reflect on Jack and how he touched us all.

II.

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

Even so, we still live, as Jack did, to make the world a better place and to leave something behind for those who follow. But we also do it to prepare for the greater life to come. And we just heard some selections from Scripture that proclaimed this Christian promise.

The reading from Isaiah foretold the messiah who would bring everlasting joy. The twenty third psalm said that we "will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever." From Revelation we heard that in the last day everything will be made new. And the Gospel of John told us how Jesus is preparing a place for us in heaven.

So, even though we experience physical death in this earthly life, we merely leave this world for the greater glory of eternity. It is not the closing of a door, but rather the opening of the heavenly gate. It's the beginning of the greatest adventure of all, actually returning to God.

And isn't that the core of our faith? Isn't it the meaning of salvation? And isn't it the most magnificent gift that that our Creator ever could have given to us?

III.

But although we know Jack now has claimed that gift and is with our Lord, we still grieve. We feel a loss because he no longer is with us. We miss him. We wish we could say thank you one more time for the joy he brought to our lives. 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.

Jack was one of the first people with whom I met when I came to St. Thomas over three years ago. The church had ordered a new sign with my name on it, and Jack was involved with wiring up the lights for that sign. He wanted to be sure I was happy with what he was doing, and of course, I was more than pleased.

But what stuck with me was Jack's kindness, his sincerity, and the way he really was interested in making me feel included in what was going on. His graciousness and goodwill were important parts of a wonderful welcome to this community, and I always will remember it.

And we all know that his devotion to the church continued after that. He was the person we called about electrical and hardware matters, and was a regular member of our Mens' Breakfast Group. He was faithful in his work and worship until the challenges of his final illness no longer allowed him to be active.

A brief description of Jack's life is in your service bulletins. The same account was in the newspaper. And while it lists a series of accomplishments that are remarkable for just one person, it seems only to scratch the surface of how we knew Jack as a person when he was among us.

Jack was a genuine good guy. His goodness was in his love and concern for others. He looked you in the eye and wanted to hear what you had to say. He always was interested in how things were going for me here at St. Thomas, and I know that was the way he approached life with everyone.

And in that sense, I remember a few of my conversations with Jack about his faith, and even a couple of comments on my sermons. He was a keen listener and asked serious questions. It was clear that God's love was a central part of his own life, and it was equally clear that his faith in our Lord and Savior was alive and strong.

When all is said and done, a good measure of peoples' lives is what they left behind and how they are remembered. Jack will be laid to rest today, but he will be remembered always for his friendship, for the dignity that radiated from him, and for the Christian example that he set.

There is an old story that sometimes is told at services like this to illustrate the certainty of our eternal hope. It's about the ship, the shore, the sea of life, and the horizon.

The day we are born we set sail on a journey. At birth we depart from the harbor in which we were formed, and we venture onto the sea of life, like a ship headed for the horizon. And after we have sailed for the time that has been appointed for us, we drop over the horizon.

Jack Boice took that journey, and he sailed on the sea of life for the time that he had, and then he dropped over the horizon. And we say, "He's gone. He's gone."

But he's not really gone, just like that ship that sails over the horizon is not really gone. We can't see him any more from where we stand, but he's still there. And on the other shore as they see him appear, they shout with joy, "Here he comes!"

IV.

And so we share our tears at parting from Jack, but we also look forward to the glory of meeting him again. And for his family, and for all of his friends here today, and for the people of St. Thomas, I pray that your sorrow, and our sorrow, soon can give way to thanksgiving for the wonderful times we all 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 Jack is safe with our Lord, and that he is waiting there for us. *Amen.*