

***Celebration of the Life of  
Phyllis Marie Buford***

March 8, 2012

**I.**

Jesus said he was going to prepare a place for us, and would take us to be with him. Isn't that a wonderful promise? It brings hope into what is a sad day. That's because even though Jesus already has welcomed Phyllis to heaven, today we say good-bye to her here.

So we're here to celebrate her life. And what a life it was! I just know that at the moment Phyllis died, the angels in heaven sent out the alert; "Get ready, here she comes!"

And to Don, Jaylene, Nancy, and the rest of the family, we want you all to know that our prayers are with you and our hearts go out to you. Phyllis was a good Christian woman, a loving wife, and a caring mother and grandmother.

We come to this place with conflicting emotions, don't we? We certainly gather in joy to celebrate Phyllis life, but we also gather in sorrow in the midst of the large empty space her passing has left in our life.

So we sit here today with profound sadness because Phyllis no longer is with us. But we also have joyful hope because we know she has claimed the promise of eternal life. In that context I would like us to think about how the Lord touched Phyllis, and how Phyllis in turn touched us.

**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).

Even so, we still live, as Phyllis did, to make the world a better place and to leave something behind for those who follow. But we know that this world is not really our home because our lives here merely prepare us for the greater life to come. We just heard some selections from Scripture that proclaimed this Christian promise.

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 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, as I said when I began, 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 Phyllis now has claimed that gift and is with our Lord, we still grieve. We feel a loss because she no longer is with us. We wish we could say thank you one more time for the joy she brought to our lives. She lit up our lives when she was here, and now that she is gone our memories of her seem to shine even brighter in our hearts.

Some of you knew Phyllis for many years. We first met five years ago when I came to St. Thomas. And I wish I had a chance to know her while Don was still with us. But I really didn't have to know Phyllis for very long in order to realize that she was an exceptional person

Phyllis was a regular and beloved part of our loyal and devout 8:00 am congregation. She frequently arrived with her dear friend Mary, and when that happened we knew the service then could begin. You almost could set your clock.

And Phyllis was very much involved in our worship and church activities. Even in her golden years she still would be entitled to a gold star for attendance, and she usually was here for our other church activities as well. The Lord was very much part of her life, and she certainly was a cherished member of our community.

I recall one of the first Sundays after I came to St. Thomas in 2006 when the service was over, and Phyllis was walking out with Don and Evelyn, who usually looked out for her every week. And I asked Phyllis how she was doing. Without missing a beat, she gave me that wondrous friendly grin of hers and said, "Well, I'm still here."

I came to learn that it was a standard response Phyllis often gave to that question, and that it reflected the optimism and good nature she had about life and about God. It was hard to be discouraged when Phyllis was around. She made every day seem to be a good day.

During this past Christmas Season we saw many re-runs of the 1946 classic movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, which starred Jimmy Stewart as George Bailey, and basically had two parts. During the first part the stage was set for George to become depressed because he thought he was stuck in a small town and would never realize his dreams. That part has nothing to do with Phyllis.

But the second part does. That's because God sent a guardian angel to show George what the world would have been like if he not had been born. And he saw, in example after example, how his life had made a difference to so many people, and how he had enriched their lives.

You could make the same kind of movie about Phyllis. She probably didn't even realize all the ways that she cheered us up, all the ways that she brightened our days, and all the ways that, by her own example, she strengthened us in our faith.

#### **IV.**

And so we share our tears at parting from Phyllis, but we also look forward to the joy of meeting her again. And for the family, and for all of her friends here today, I pray that your sorrow, and our sorrow, soon can give way to thanksgiving for the wonderful times with her and the memories she left behind.

And that prayer also goes out for all of us at St. Thomas who worshipped here with Phyllis. The 8:00 am service just doesn't seem the same. I look out right now at where Phyllis always sat, and I am saddened to know she will not sit there again.

But I also know that she is sitting up there. And light will emerge from darkness. A sense of peace will come. The Lord will be with all of us and will sustain us.

And 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 Phyllis is safe with our Lord, and that she is waiting there for us. *Amen.*