

ABOUNDING IN THE LORD'S WORK

1 Corinthians 15:51-58; Harold Bergt Funeral; November 3, 2018

When considering the life God gave Harold in this world, two things stand out to me: his family and his work as a Lutheran educator.

Since I got to know Harold only later in his life, it was primarily as the devoted husband of Helen, father, grandfather, great grandfather, and uncle – not just of the family members who lived nearby, but those scattered around the state and country that he would travel to see when still able, and those who traveled to see him here.

When I would visit with him, it wasn't hard to get Harold to talk about his family. He was proud of you, especially of your faithfulness to God and your Church. At those visits, since he was no longer able to come to church, I would also give him the Lord's Supper in a brief service, and at the end include a prayer.

In my visit with members I will hear about family celebrations as well as needs, and will offer to include some of those things in my prayer. But Harold almost always declined my offers to pray for you. At first I was a little put off by it thinking, "Don't you want my prayers? What's wrong with my prayers?" But I had it all wrong. I didn't understand. Harold had it covered. He'd already prayed for each of you by name, something he did at least daily in his devotions. Praying for you was his job, his God-giving responsibility, not something he would delegate anyone else. He couldn't do much else anymore in this life, but this was the task, the work that God had given him to do and no one was going to take it away from him.

He had taken to heart God's Word through St. Paul in the last verse of the Epistle which he chose for the Service: **Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.** Praying for you was the work the Lord had given Harold to do. In faith in God, he remained steadfast, immovable, and abounding in this good work. His labor was not in vain. It is clear to me that God heard his prayers for you and answered them according to His good and gracious will. I'm sure it gave you great comfort knowing his constant prayers for you.

Harold's love for his family, great as it was, was exceeded by his love of and trust in his Lord Jesus Christ. Harold never wore his emotions on his sleeve – something some of his family might have inherited from him – but showed his faith in a quiet strength. I'm sure the emotions were there, but they weren't on display for outsiders. His faith in God reflected the way St. Paul taught the resurrection in First Corinthians 15.

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is nothing more painful than losing a loved one to death. And there is certainly nothing wrong with showing emotion and sorrow at the time of a death. But in this passage of Scripture, St. Paul deals with death caused by sin in a matter-of-fact way. He acknowledges death as the fact and consequence of sin, but proclaims that death has been defeated. Our Lord Jesus Christ has won the victory over sin-caused death by His death on the cross and resurrection.

Harold faced the loss of loved ones to death and his death with the confidence of faith in his Lord Jesus Christ. He certainly didn't like the way age was taking away his strength of body, but he had a quiet acceptance borne by the confidence that this perishable body would one day put on the imperishable and this mortal body put on immortality. His confidence was in Jesus Christ, who took his sin into His imperishable body, died on the cross, and rose to life immortal. Harold's body, which died with the frailness of age and disease brought on by sin, will be raised in the strength of Jesus Christ to live forever without sin.

This Good News was behind Harold's work as a Lutheran educator and principal. He had a long and distinguished career in education that was rightly recognized, for which he received honors. He was recognized by others as a leader in education and called on to serve on boards and committees that not just met but got things done.

His love for Lutheran education – and education in general – was passed down to his children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. In retirement Harold offered his years of experience and wealth of knowledge help bring about the founding of Martin Luther High School, something folks in this part of southern Minnesota had dreamed about and hoped would happen for decades. He got to see grandchildren graduate from that institution and become Lutheran School teachers. The next generation, his great grandchildren, have begun to attend and receive a Lutheran high school education, which is part of the legacy of his hard work and dedication. St. Paul's words also apply here. **Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the Lord's work, knowing that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.**

I was glad to have been able to visit with Harold a few times after he suffered his stroke, and that he was able to still speak and comprehend what was going on, though confused at times. He had missed being at the Missouri Synod Communion Service the Friday before because of his stroke, so I was glad he was able to receive the Lord's Supper for the last time – I think – the following Wednesday. He was weakened physically and mentally, but he boldly and confidently confessed his sins, his faith in God and the forgiveness of his sins for Jesus' sake. He believed that in the body and blood of Jesus, which were given into death on the cross and raised from the dead, he had the promised life eternal and the resurrection of his body on the Last Day.

Harold showed some confusion caused by the stroke when he commented that it sounded like the horses had gotten loose when he heard some commotion in the hallway outside his room at the Lakeview Methodist Home. You know someone has lived a long life when he remembers life as a Nebraska farm kid when horses, not tractors and combines, provided the power.

In a few minutes it will be time for the kickoff for the Nebraska Cornhuskers football game. Harold was a steadfast and immovable Cornhuskers fan. It would take a miracle for them to beat Ohio State and turn around their season. I wonder if Harold can do anything about that from heaven.

Whatever the outcome of the game, today we give thanks that the Lord's work has been accomplished in Jesus Christ.

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“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” (Rev. 14:23) Amen.