

***Celebration of the Life of
Lewis Davis***
February 17, 2007

I.

This is an emotional time, isn't it? We all are united here in sorrow at the death of our friend and brother Lewis. And for now, the immediate reality of death, and the sense of loss that accompanies it, can temporarily overshadow the uplifting remembrance that accompanies a Christian life well lived.

But just as we are united in sorrow, we also are united in our faith and its promise of eternal life. Because of our faith, we can look without fear beyond the grave, and anticipate the eternal home of the soul.

II.

So, while we mourn, it also is a time to celebrate Lewis and to remember his life. And as we recall Lewis, we know that he would not have wanted a big ceremony. He would have wanted us to keep it simple; just the basics.

And if we could find some humor in our service today, I think he also would have wanted us to do that. Lewis was not one to complain, and the ease with which he smiled and laughed encouraged others to do the same. We all know how Lewis liked jokes; he seemed to have one for every occasion. When he learned that I used to be a lawyer he had several about my former profession. One of them comes to mind today, and I know he would want me to tell it one more time as we think about him.

It's a story that involved a funeral and a lawyer, and it seems a very wealthy man knew that the end was near, and so he called three of his closest friends together. One was a doctor, another was a school teacher, and the third was a lawyer.

The wealthy man gave each one of them an envelope containing twenty five thousand dollars in cash, and told them that when they came by for the viewing after he died he wanted each of them to drop the envelope and cash in his casket. He literally wanted to take it all with him.

The three friends thought the request a little strange, but it was his money and his last request, and so they agreed.

Well, the fellow soon passed on, there was a viewing, and his three friends came by and dropped their envelopes in his casket.

Later on, they happened to be together, and the doctor said, "you know, I really feel guilty. I'm building an addition to my clinic so that I can provide better medical services to the poor and needy who have no insurance, and I took five thousand dollars of that money. My envelope only had twenty thousand dollars in it."

The school teacher then said that he also felt a little guilty. He said that he was building a computer lab to help disadvantaged children learn about computers, and that he took out ten thousand dollars to buy new equipment for these needy children.

The lawyer just shook his head. He said, "I'm really surprised at you two, and what you did. I'll have you know that I put in a check for the full amount."

Well, the deceased in that story never would be able to cash that check. But there is another kind of check that Christians can cash. It's a check written to us in the blood of Christ, and it is drawn on a bank that will always pay off, and it will buy us a ticket on the train to eternity.

III.

We just heard some readings from Scripture that described this Christian hope. And these readings are important not because they sound good, and not because they 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. Paul's first letter to the Corinthians proclaimed that we will have immortal spiritual bodies because death has been swallowed up in Christ's victory for us. And the Gospel of John assured us that all who believe in that victory will have eternal life and be raised up on the last day.

Lewis now has claimed that promise. He has cashed that check. He is with that great multitude of the faithful about whom the Book of Revelation said, "they will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

IV.

So death is not the closing of a door, but rather the opening of the heavenly gate to eternity. For us, it is not just birth, life, and death, and that's all there is to it. Instead it is life, death, resurrection, and eternity in God's presence.

We do not just die, but we die in Christ, and that makes all the difference in the world, both in this world and the next. If a person lives for God, then the day of death actually is greater than the day of birth. For death actually ends only a fleeting earthly existence, and it's the beginning of the greatest and most wonderful adventure of all, actually returning to God.

Even so, we still grieve at times like this. We know there is a loss because Lewis no longer is with us. He's beyond our touch, and beyond any means to touch us any more, at least physically.

But he has touched us, and his memory touches us still. And he will continue to touch us by his example of care and concern for others, and by his way of encouraging us and lifting us up when we were down.

Lewis did not get many headlines. We didn't see his face on television. He, like most of the rest of us, may not have been a great and famous man by the world's standards.. It's likely that no monuments or statues will be erected in his honor. We don't expect that any schools, bridges, or buildings will bear his name.

But Lewis was a great man for other reasons. His greatness was in his love and concern for others. It was in his spirituality, and in his unshakeable conviction that he had truly been blessed by God. His greatness was in his commitment to helping others deal with the burdens of their lives. His greatness was in the example he set. It was difficult to be depressed when Lewis was in the room.

And so we share our tears at parting from Lewis, but we also look forward to the joys of meeting him again. And to Helen, and Rachel, and John, and all others in the family, I pray that your grief can soon give way to thanksgivings for the wonderful times you had with Lewis.

V.

There is an old story that sometimes is told at services like this to illustrate the certainty of our eternal hope. Some of you may have heard it before at other funerals, and it could be new to others here today. With that disclaimer I will tell you about the ship, the shore, the sea of life, and the horizon.

The day we are born we set sail on a journey. At our 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.

Lewis Davis 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 then 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 they see him appear, and they shout with joy, "here he comes!"

VI.

Now that Lewis is there, heaven is better off for it. And we are better off for the time that Lewis had with us. Lewis is gone but he left a lot behind. He was a good friend, a Christian brother, a caring father, and a devoted and loving husband who will be missed.

When you add it all up, there isn't much of anything else that Lewis could have done. He indeed was a good and faithful servant. So, we grieve, but we grieve with hope. And with hope our grief about Lewis will pass and be replaced by the comfort of knowing that he is safe with our Lord, and that he is waiting there for us. *Amen.*