

***Celebration of the Life of
Richard Leon Thompson***

March 30, 2007

I.

This is a difficult and emotional time, isn't it? We're all united here in sorrow at the death of our friend and brother Richard. Many of us knew him here in Diamondhead, and I know that several family members traveled long distances to be here today with Evelyn.

And for now, for today and for while to come, 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 we can anticipate with joy the eternal home of the soul. 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 Richard's life.

II.

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. The twenty third psalm is a classic and lyrical statement of God's promise to us. "I will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever." And 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, with its story of raising Lazarus from the dead, sets the stage for one of the most significant statements that Jesus ever uttered. He said "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die."

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

Richard now has claimed that gift. He now 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."

III.

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 to eternity. For us, it's not birth, life, and death, and that's all there is to it. Instead it's life, death, and resurrection.

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.

In a way, from the moment we are born we are called to run the race of life. The Book of Hebrews urges us to run that race with perseverance.

And it's a race where there is no finish line, in this world at least. Certainly the starting blocks are in this world, and the track is in this world, and we all know that the high hurdles that can trip us up are in this world. But the finish line is in the next world. And when we do finish it we receive the crown of glory given to those who kept the faith.

IV.

Even so, we still grieve at times like this. We feel a loss because Richard no longer is with us. He is 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.

Richard, like most of the rest of us, did not get a lot of headlines. We didn't see his face on television. For him, like most of us, 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 Richard was a great man for other reasons. His greatness was in his care and concern for others. It was in his genuine love of life and the years he and Evelyn spent together. His greatness was in helping others, and in the example he set.

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

V.

A good measure of peoples' lives is what they left behind. And we are better off for the time that Richard had with us. He's gone but he left a lot behind. He was a good friend, a good and faithful brother, a caring father, and a devoted and loving husband who will be missed.

So, we grieve, but we grieve with hope. And with hope our grief about Richard 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.*