

***Celebration of the Life of
Leahmon P. (Mac) McElveen, Jr.***

July 21, 2009

I.

Today is a difficult day for us. We come to remember a man we loved and who loved us. We know that he's no longer with us in this world, but we still wish we could see his smiling face and hear his booming voice one more time.

But there's also another side to this day. Even though we are united in sorrow because of the death of our friend and brother, Mac, we're also here to remember and celebrate his life. And what a life it was! Eighty three years of devotion to duty, brotherly love, and kindness. Eighty three years of energy, vitality, and enthusiasm.

I know that at the moment of Mac's death the angels in heaven sent out the alert; "Get ready, here he comes!"

And to Darryl and Larry, Donna and Steve, Denise and Marcel, 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. Mac was a fine Christian man, a loving husband, a caring father, a proud grandfather, a true friend, and a brave patriot. His passing leaves a large empty space in many lives, and it will leave a large empty space here at St. Thomas.

So we sit here today with two kinds of emotions. One is profound sadness because Mac no longer is with us. The other is joyful hope because we know he has claimed the promise of eternal life.

And so I would like to take the next few minutes to talk about how the Lord touched Mac, and how Mac in turn touched us. After I finish, two of Mac's grandchildren will share their remembrances of him. And then, before we continue with the service, Mac's beloved brothers from the Military Order of the Purple Heart would like to come forward for a final salute.

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 Mac 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. 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 in this earthly life we experience physical death, 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.

III.

But although we know Mac is with our Lord, we still grieve at times like this. 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.

Mac became a member of St. Thomas a few months before I got here, and when I first met him it seemed he already had taken charge. And it was obvious right away that he was an exceptional person.

He was a man of integrity and principle, which was evident from his military career, his professional life, and his sense of civic duty. He was a man of courage, which we all saw in the grace and humor with which he dealt with the blessings and the difficulties in his life. And perhaps, most importantly, he was a man forever marked in our memories by the love and respect he generated in others, especially his family.

A brief description of Mac's life is on the last two pages of your service bulletins. The same account was in the newspapers. And while it is detailed and comprehensive, and lists a series of accomplishments that are remarkable for just one person, it seems only to scratch the surface of Mac's presence among us. And when I say presence, you all know he truly was a presence.

When Mac was in the room there was no doubt he was in the room. And when you were around him it was absolutely impossible to be unhappy, or sad, or depressed. Without demanding it he made us smile. And with his ever present good humor and upbeat outlook he lived as an example of how to overcome adversity.

Now and then we encounter people who truly seem larger than life. Mac was such a person. He had a personal charm and magnetism that drew you to him. He would have been a wonderful preacher.

And in that sense, I remember a few of my conversations with Mac about his faith, and some of his comments on my sermons. He was a serious listener and frequently asked penetrating 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.

To use a sports analogy, I could say that from the moment we are born we are called to run the race of life. The Bible urges us to run that race with perseverance (Heb. 12:1).

And it's a race where there is no finish line, not 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 we must overcome are in this world. But the finish line is in the next world. And when we do reach that line we receive the crown of glory given to those who kept the faith. Mac faithfully ran the race, and now he wears that glorious crown.

And so, when all is said and done, a good measure of peoples' lives is what they left behind and how they are remembered. Mac will be laid to rest today, but he will be remembered always for his friendship, for the way he put others ahead of himself, for the dignity that radiated from him, and for the Christian example that he set.

IV.

We share our tears at parting from Mac, but we also look forward to the joy 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 Mac is safe with our Lord, and that he is waiting there for us. *Amen.*