

***Celebration of the Life of
William Lee Montjoy***

September 29, 2010

I.

This is a difficult day for us. We do not expect to lose young children. It devastates even the strongest among us. And so to Lea and Paul, and to Eastman and Jackson and the entire Montjoy family, and to Veronica, our prayers are with you and our hearts go out to you. We would rather be somewhere else.

But nevertheless we are here. So during this time I would like to share a few thoughts about this mystery of life and death that we can only apprehend, but not truly comprehend. And when I finish, William's grandfather, Paul Montjoy, III, and his beloved nanny, Veronica Harrington, would like to come forward and share some remembrances of William with you.

In the Christian church a funeral not only is a time of grief and sorrow, but also is thought of as a celebration of life. Look at the cover of the bulletin in your hands, and you will see that's what we call this service.

You also will see something else. There also is a poignant picture of a beautiful three year old boy standing in the beach grass. So this is not a typical celebration of life. We are not here to remember a life well-lived, even though we do recall with joy the time William was with us.

And there is something to celebrate. During his entire life William only knew continual and unconditional love. And now he will know an even greater love forever.

William now is fine. But we still must wonder about the random chances for misfortune that swirl around us all. Why do bad things happen to good people? And no one is exempt. I'm sure that all of us have been touched, in some way or another, by accidents and calamities.

II.

And that's what happened to little William. It was an accident. It happened because the world still can be a treacherous place. I think I can say it's not as treacherous as it was a century ago. And a century ago it was safer than during the time before that. Things are getting better. God's plan brings us closer to the kingdom each day.

But it's not here yet. And what's taking so long? The answer is God's time is not our time. The Bible speculates, for example, that a thousand years on earth could be but a day in heaven (2 Pe. 3:8). But we really don't know how that works. All we know that God's plans will become fully known when God is ready. And then only good things will happen to good people.

But until that time we also know the world is broken. And broken things like this happen. God is fixing it, and our faith in that reality sustains us. Our sure and certain hope in God's promises and God's love strengthens us at times like this.

And through that faith and trust in God we can overcome the trials we face, even difficult trials like we experience today. God will bless us and lift us from the pit of despair. The Psalms tell us "the Lord is close to the brokenhearted" (34:18). Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted" (Mt. 5:4).

III.

And we also can draw comfort from the Scripture we just heard. The reading from Isaiah said that the spirit of the Lord is upon us, and he has clothed us in the garments of salvation. The twenty

third Psalm promised we “will dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.” From First John we heard that we all are children of God, and Mark’s Gospel spoke of Jesus’ special love for little children.

A poem thought to be written by early twentieth century educator and clergyman, Henry Van Dyke, frequently is mentioned on occasions such as this. It speaks of how we all, like ships, are passing through this world on our way to a place of greater glory. William had embarked on that journey, and in his ship he was sailing toward the horizon that we all must cross.

But then his sails dropped over the horizon and we said he’s gone. He’s gone. But he isn’t really gone. We can’t see him any more, but he’s still there. And on that other shore, when his sails appear, they all shout with joy, “Here he comes, here he comes.”

So we know that even though we all 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.

But even though we know William is with our Lord, we still grieve at times like this. We miss him. We wish we could touch him one more time. 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.

And we might think about shining lights as our lives go on. What do we do at night when the power unexpectedly goes off and the house becomes dark? We at least look for a candle. Even a small candle will suffice just to get started. We are in a similar situation today. And the candle that will give us light in this particular darkness is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Even now, in the shadows of our sorrow and despair, that candle flickers and beckons to us. Jesus says come to me, and you will find rest for your souls (Mt. 11:29). And as we embrace that candle, Christ’s light and love will embrace us, and it will grow and spread and eventually restore us.

IV.

So we share our tears at parting from William, but we also look forward to the joy of meeting him again. And for Lea and Paul, and the family and all their friends, I pray that your sorrow, and our sorrow, soon can give way to thanksgiving for the precious time that William gave you.

Light will emerge from darkness. A sense of peace will come. Your family still needs you and the church is here to support you. And most importantly, the Lord is with you now, he will continue to be with you, and will carry you always.

And so, we grieve, but we grieve with hope. And with the power of hope the grief we feel today will start to heal, and we will grow in the comfort of knowing that William is safe and happy in the arms of our Lord, and is waiting there for us. *Amen.*