

Funeral – Allen Knutson  
Zumbro Lutheran Church  
November 7, 2011  
Pastor Vern Christopherson

Maggie, David, Daniel, family and friends, grace and peace to you from the one who lived for us, who died for us, and who now claims victory over every grave, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

The song we just sang, *On Eagle's Wings*, is based on Isaiah 40. This chapter came from one of Israel's darkest times. The people had been stuck in exile in Babylon for almost 50 years. They were far away from their land, with seemingly no chance of ever returning home. They cried out to God again and again, but there was no answer. Only darkness. They thought that maybe God had forgotten them. Or worse, that maybe God didn't care.

Then one day the prophet Isaiah came on the scene. He spoke words almost too good to be true. "God has not forgotten you," Isaiah told them, "Even though you're down, God will lift you up." Then Isaiah said: "Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they should mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."

In many ways, these words remind me of Al. Al was vibrant and strong and full of life. And then one day, in the blink of an eye, everything changed, and he fell down exhausted. And now we are left to pick up the pieces and try to go on.

Al's very full life started back in 1934 on a farm near Spring Grove. Al was the fourth of seven children. There was always plenty to do on the farm: crops to plant, livestock to feed, chores to tend, weeds to pull. Al went to a country school through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and then he attended a portion of high school in Spring Grove. But spending hours and hours sitting at a desk wasn't really Al's idea of a good time. He eventually got his GED after joining the Navy.

Al was vibrant and strong and full of life. He served his country with honor. He sailed on ships all over the world, working as a gunner's mate. After the Navy, Al moved to Rochester. He got a job at the state hospital as a psychiatric technician. One eventful day, Al

came walking into the dining room in the hospital. He was wearing a white shirt and white pants. He caught the eye of a certain young woman named Margaret Welti. That was convenient, because, as it turns out, Margaret caught his eye as well. In fact, Al turned to his sister Marilyn, who was also working at the hospital, and blurted out, “Marilyn, get me a date with that girl.” Marilyn replied, “Get your own date.” That was all the incentive Al needed. Before you know it, he walked up to Margaret Welti and introduced himself.

Maggie still remembers their first date: they went out to a movie together. She doesn’t recall the name of the movie, but she does recall her feelings at the end of the evening: “I don’t like this guy at all.” Now, perhaps Al was persistent, or Maggie was simply too nice to say no, but they kept going out...for 2½ years. And wouldn’t you know it, one day these two were married at St. Francis of Assisi in Rochester.

Al continued working as a psychiatric technician at the state hospital. Maggie continued working as a secretary. After awhile they had a baby named David. Their basement apartment was suddenly feeling a bit cramped. By the time Maggie found out she was pregnant with Daniel, they decided it was time to buy a house. They found one on 9<sup>th</sup> Street SE. This would end up being the family home for a number of years.

Al was vibrant and strong and full of life. He liked keeping busy and working hard and being outdoors. In his spare time, he would take the boys down to the farm. As they got older, they would ride motorcycles and go hunting and fishing. Al really enjoyed spending time with them.

Eventually, Al’s close relationship with the boys led them to go into business together. Knutson Painting was born. It’s been in operation ever since—over twenty years. Even though Al was 77-years-old, and even though he’d had some heart problems along the way, he kept right on painting. He showed few signs of slowing down.

Al was vibrant and strong and full of life. His theme song was one by Willie Nelson, “On the road again, just can’t wait to get on the road again. The life I love is making music with my friends. And I just can’t wait to get on the road again.” Yes, Al was tireless in his work and in his play.

Then one day, one sad day, on Leech Lake, Al suffered a serious heart attack. His buddies got him to the hospital in Brainerd where he had a stint put in. That seemed to take care of it. Al came home to Rochester. He even tried some painting. But a week or so later,

Al started having chest pains. Suddenly it was hard for him to breathe. The surgeon said he needed bypass surgery and two new heart valves. The surgery took place, but Al never really recovered from it. The doctors tried and tried, and the family prayed and prayed, but it was not meant to be. As Al lay in intensive care for days on end, Maggie commented, “He wasn’t really living. He was just existing.”

Isaiah said it well: *Even youths will faint and be weary. Even vibrant, full-of-life painters and hunters and husbands and fathers can grow weary and fall down exhausted.* So what do we do? We do the same thing Israel did in Babylon. We cry out to God for help: “Come and heal us, Lord. Come and save us.” Sometimes that pray gets answered with a *yes* and our loved ones recover. And sometimes it doesn’t and we’re left to wonder why. There aren’t many answers to that question. About all we can do is trust is that God holds Allen’s future in his hands, just like God holds ours.

It’s hard to think about saying goodbye today. Allen’s death leaves a big, empty place inside. He’s going to be missed. In the midst of our pain, it’s important that we honor his life and tell stories and surround Maggie and the family with our support and love.

Still, our sadness is not the end of the story. Like Israel of old, we’re called to keep trusting. Remember Isaiah: *Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Here’s the truth: even in our darkest moments, you see, God comes to give us hope. To a people stuck in Babylon, God sent a *prophet* to tell them he was going to save them. And many years later, God did it again. To a people stuck in sin and death, God sent a *Son* to tell them he was going to save them. And now, because Jesus died and rose again for us, we have a hope that not even death can destroy.

Al was vibrant and strong and full of life. Then one day he fell down exhausted. Al waited and waited for the Lord to renew his strength. He waited so that someday he could mount up with wings like an eagle. That day has come, maybe not exactly when we would have planned it, but it has come. Al is walking and leaping and praising God even now. God has called him home. Amen.