

Funeral – Eddie Langhus
May 16, 2011
Pastor Vern Christopherson

Inez, David, Jim, Barb, Karen, 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 risen Lord and Savior. Amen

The Apostle Paul once wrote to the Philippians: “I am sure of this, that the one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ.” Paul wrote these encouraging words while sitting, of all places, in a prison. He sensed that his life might soon be coming to an end. Because of it, he was taking stock of his work as a church planter. He was looking back at the beginnings of the little church he started in Philippi. He was looking ahead to what this church might still become. I can imagine that—with the end in sight—Paul was keenly aware of all the work still to do. There were sermons to preach, squabbles to fix, sick people to visit, baptisms to arrange, and on and on. The fact of the matter was, with all the work still to do, somebody besides Paul was going to have to do it.

I went to visit Eddie and Inez a few months ago in their home. Eddie didn't have much energy at the time, but we had a good talk. I think he was talking stock of his life. He told me about his family, where they'd lived, what he'd done for work. When I started admiring the pictures on the wall, Eddie seemed to perk up just a little. There was a painting of a coastline in Norway and a scene near the Article Circle. Pretty soon Eddie was out of his chair and heading toward his art studio. Inez gently chided him for not using his walker, but Eddie was determined. He wanted to talk to me about his paintings.

By the time we got to the studio, Eddie had come to life. He began taking paintings out of the drawers. One after the other, he told me about them. I saw the bold colors and the artistic designs. His passion and creativity were evident. Then I noticed the painting on the easel. I commented on how much I liked it. Eddie said, “Oh, that's an unfinished painting. I'm still working on it. I'm using acrylics.” Just then I had a sad thought, “Eddie's not going to be able to finish it.”

As we near the end of life, much like the Apostle Paul, there is work we must leave for others to do. But hopefully Paul's words still ring true: That the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ.

God began a good work in Eddie Langhus a long time. Our story begins even before Eddie was born. Eddie's mother, Annie Sophia Grosfield, left Norway when she was only 17-years-old. There was a ship going to America. Someone canceled at the last minute. That opened up a spot for Sophia, as she was called. As Sophia left home, the one bit of advice she got from her parents was this: "Whatever you do when you get to America, don't marry a Langhus." Well, obviously that didn't stick. Sophia met Ludvig Langhus. They got married. A little boy named Eddie was the youngest of their brood of children.

God's good work in Eddie continued. Eddie grew up on a farm near Shelly, Minnesota. His mom never learned English, but Eddie learned it from his older sisters. By the time he got to first grade, he was ready to study in English. As you might imagine, everyone had to pitch in and help on the farm. There were always chores to do. Eddie spent so much time helping out, that he never really excelled in school. Even so, the superintendent in high school singled him out. He encouraged him to go on for more schooling. "You've got a lot to offer," he told Eddie.

Eddie was accepted to Luther College. He attended for a couple of years. Then World War II broke out. Eddie's older brother, Gunnar, went off to serve in the war. Eddie had to come home and help with the farm.

God's good work in Eddie continued. During this time, Eddie got introduced to a young woman named Inez Johnson. Inez and a friend had taken a bus from the nearby town of Mentor to visit some young men in Shelley. It was sort of a blind date. According to Inez, it wasn't exactly love at first sight. But Inez and Eddie did hit it off. And then they bumped into each other again at the county fair in Fertile. Pretty soon Eddie was coming to see her on a regular basis. Eddie and Inez were married on June 30, 1946 at the Lutheran church in Mentor.

The war was finally over. Eddie was able to return to Luther College. Inez worked at the local Gambles Store. Pretty soon there a little baby boy named David in their lives. After graduation, they were off to Buffalo Center, Iowa. Eddie taught there

for five years. He taught everything from German to biology to girls' physical education. The family got a bit bigger: Jim was born.

God's good work in Eddie continued. Eddie got a job working in a medical science lab at the Mayo Clinic. The family moved to Rochester. A couple of girls came along: Barb and Karen. These were good days for the family. There were lots of hugs and kisses. They ate meals together. There were prayers shared at bedtime. Every Thanksgiving for the table grace the kids were expected to recite Psalm 100 from memory. "Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come into his presence with singing."

Along the way, Eddie started taking night classes at Winona State. He was working on a master's degree in guidance and counseling. With four bustling children in the household, and Eddie hard at work studying for his classes, mom had to do a lot of "shushing" in the evening. Although these were good kids, they got the "look" more than a few times. The "look" told them it was time to settle down so dad could concentrate.

Jim remembers that the family didn't have a lot of extra money back in those days. New toys were few and far between. But Mom and Dad encouraged them to be creative with what they could find around the house: leftover fabric, scrap lumber, pieces of wire, old radios and TVs. Says Jim: "We learned life skills we could not have learned in school."

The family joined Zumbro Lutheran Church. Eddie was part of the choir. He loved to sing. In fact, he had a habit of singing much of the time, whether he could remember the words of a song or not. When Zumbro moved into the present building in 1970, Eddie helped carry some of the organ pipes to the new church.

God's good work in Eddie continued. After 18 years at Mayo, Eddie got a job in St. Cloud working as a counselor at the Minnesota State Services for the Blind. While living in St. Cloud, Eddie built their dream house just outside of town. Eddie and the family did most of the work themselves. They recall the day the I-beam was delivered. The delivery guy showed up with the beam on the truck. He wondered where the crew was. Eddie pointed to himself, Jim, Karen, and Barb. The guy got a little nervous. This was a job normally done with a crane. He unloaded the I-beam as fast as he could and left. But not to worry, these four were able to put it in place. Eventually their dream

home was finished. A favorite part of the home was a breakfast nook that overlooked the lagoon in the back yard.

God's good work in Eddie continued. The children grew up and left home. Eddie and Inez eventually moved back to Rochester to be closer to family. They built a small home on Bamber Ridge. The home had just enough room for an art studio and a garage. Eddie was perfectly content. He loved building and tinkering and fixing. There was work still to do. Paintings to be made. Eddie never stopped creating.

This past Easter Sunday Eddie was in the hospital. I went to visit him after worship. He was feeling kind of low. We read the Easter story together. We talked a little. I asked him how he was doing. He sighed and said: "I'm ready to go home." Eddie didn't say what he meant by that—whether he was ready to go home to his apartment or to go home to be with his Lord. I had a feeling he meant the latter. His heart wasn't working very well. He had lost almost all his strength.

Eddie died this past Wednesday. God's good work in him was finally done. Jesus' promise to him was coming true: "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also."

We're going to miss Eddie. We're going to miss his gentle laugh. We're going to miss his strong hands. We're going to miss his creative energy. In the midst of our sadness, we look for a place to put our trust. Because of Easter, we trust that in life and in death, we belong to God. We trust that our future is in God's hands.

One day, when our final breath draws near, our work also will not be done. But the good news is this: the one who began a good work in us will bring it to completion on the day of Jesus Christ. Amen.