

Funeral – Nina Sudor  
Zumbro Lutheran Church  
April 10, 2011  
Pastor Vern Christopherson

Don, Joan, Jennifer, Ellen, Jim, 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 Lord and Savior. Amen.

In the book of Genesis there's a delightful story about a dinner party. Abraham and Sarah host the party. Many years before God made a promise to them that they would have a child, and through this child God would love and bless the world. Abraham and Sarah wait and wait but no child comes. Now they are spending most of their time in rocking chairs.

One day three mysterious visitors come walking their way. As is the custom, Abraham and Sarah invite them to come out of the hot sun and join them in their tent. They get busy preparing a meal for them. They spare no expense. Abraham kills a fatted calf. Sarah bakes a cake. They find some fresh milk. In no time at all, the feast is set before their guests.

When the meal is over, things get especially interesting. The mysterious visitors have an announcement to make: Sarah is going to have a baby. God will keep his promise to them. Through this baby and its descendents, God will love and bless the world. Sarah is overcome. Upon hearing the news, in fact, she bursts out laughing—a touch of arthritis and a rocking chair will do that to you. As it turns out, not only is God faithful to his promises, God also has a sense of humor. The next spring, when the baby is born, God instructs them to name him Isaac, which means “laughter.”

We're gathered today to remember and honor a woman who definitely knew how to throw a party. From what I've been told, Nina's parties were every bit as gracious and inviting as those of Abraham and Sarah. In fact, her family referred to her as the “party planner extraordinaire.” Nina welcomed any and all to her table. She spared no expense. Everything from the invitations, to the color-coordinated decorations, to the place settings, to the food had to be just so. I have a feeling that, in the process of welcoming people into her home, God used Nina to love and bless the world.

Nina's penchant for parties began in Jamestown, North Dakota. Her dad, Fred, worked for the Northern Pacific Railroad. Her mother, Tillie, was a cook, a very good cook. Tillie learned how to cook growing up in a household with 19 children. Her specialties were German dishes such as Kuchen and Halupsi. She also made a mean beef stroganoff. When Nina was five, the family spent a year living—of all places—in a railroad boxcar. No kidding. It was during the Depression. Several men, including Nina's father, took the train to California looking for work. Tillie went along to cook for them. That meant the kids went too. Fred got a job painting the Golden Gate Bridge. The family had a marvelous time in California. They considered it a grand adventure. Every day was a little like a party. And since the Golden Gate Bridge had never been painted before, they were part of history-in-the-making.

Because of this California adventure, Nina started school a year late. She and her brother James, who was a year younger, ended up being in the same grade. Many looked upon them as twins. Nina played drums in the school band which was rare for a girl back in those days. She lettered in band and still had the letter jacket to prove it.

Following high school, Nina spread her wings by moving to the Twin Cities. She took her party planning skills with her. Not long after coming to town, she was introduced to a young man named Don Sudor. Don had been hanging out with a buddy at the local drugstore drinking a Coke. His friend asked if he wanted to meet his cousin who lived just a few blocks away. Don was glad to tag along. It turns out the cousin had a roommate named Nina Klundt. Don was impressed enough to ask her out on a date. They went to a Fred Astaire movie called, "Three Little Words." Those three little words turned out to be *I Love You*, which turned out to be prophetic. After the date, Don decided that Nina was simply "enchanting." Pretty soon these two were going steady.

Now, not to throw cold water on this budding romance, but there was a matter of some urgency: Don's deferment from military service was almost up. Don was attending the University of Minnesota. So Don and Nina ended up getting married during spring break. Don went back to classes on Monday.

The party was about to get bigger. Don got a job working in quality control for IBM in the Twin Cities. Joan came along. Soon after came Jennifer. The family moved to Rochester. They bought a house on 8<sup>th</sup> Ave South. Ellen was born and then James.

The house was bursting at the seams. Mom and dad were sleeping on a hide-a-bed in the living room. The family moved to two-story brick house on 15<sup>th</sup> Ave South. It would be their home for 41 years.

Nina was a stay-at-home mom. She loved taking care of her family. She cooked for them. She taught Sunday School. She planned wonderful birthday parties. On the Fourth of July, one of her favorite holidays, she organized a neighborhood parade. Everyone wore red, white, and blue. Every summer the family loaded up the station wagon and went on a vacation. They often went to a resort in northern Minnesota. Nina loved to sit on the beach and soak in the sun. She also loved history, so they traveled to faraway places like Williamsburg, Virginia and Newport, Rhode Island.

Through it all, Nina had a tremendous influence on her children. She passed along her love of gardening, and particularly fairy gardening, to Joan. She taught Jennifer how to play softball. She inspired Ellen to go into interior design. She embodied for Jim the definition of “a true lady.” And on and on we could go.

Year in and year out, Nina was the glue that held this family together. And her parties were a big part of their gatherings: birthday parties, Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas, Fourth of July. You name a holiday, and Nina had a party to go with it.

Some years back, Nina merged her love of parties and her love of history into a newfound mission in life. She was one of the founding members of the Friends of Maywood. Seven couples each recruited seven more couples for a total of 49. Each group got assigned a room at Maywood to decorate. for Christmas. It turned out to be a big hit, and then an annual tradition. It got a little bigger every year until the History Center finally took it over.

Along the way, grandchildren were born. Each birth was a special event. Nina was always there and she was always ready to help. She doted on those babies and was widely known to “spoil them rotten.”

The years went by. The family continued to get together. Nina continued to plan parties and carry them out to perfection. And then on November 28<sup>th</sup> of this past year, the tables were turned. For Nina’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, some of her friends threw a party for her. It was a surprise. They held it at Maywood. It was absolutely lovely. Nina was queen for a day.

Sadly, on Christmas Eve Nina came down with pneumonia. It held on for the longest time. There were countless trips to the doctor and a stay in the hospital. Eventually Nina was diagnosed with lung cancer. In the middle of this, Nina decided she wanted to have a Valentine's Party. She made a list of everyone she wanted to invite. She planned the menu. She ordered the decorations. But alas, she wasn't able to carry it through. She couldn't find the strength.

There was still one more party to look forward to, however. Don and Nina's 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary was coming up on March 31<sup>st</sup>. Because Nina was getting weaker, the family decided to celebrate a few days early. They served punch and marble cupcakes at Madonna Towers. Even though Nina was not well, she was in her element. She was grateful for the good food and conversation. She was surrounded by people she loved. This would be her last party.

As we said, a long time ago God came to visit Abraham and Sarah. God used a party to announce that they were going to have a baby. God was going to love and bless the world through this baby and its descendants. Sure enough, generation passed, and another baby was born. This baby would grow up to love and bless the world. He spent a lot of time at parties. He hung out with fishermen. He ate with tax collectors and sinners. Once, at a wedding, he even turned water into wine.

Believe it or not, this man got into trouble because of the parties he attended and the company he kept. He ended up getting strung up on a tree. Shortly before he died, he had a party. It was a simple party. He served bread and wine. He promised that someday, in the coming kingdom, there would be room at the table for any and all. No expense would be spared. People from all over the world would be invited. They would sit down to a table full of love. Ultimately, God's plan to love and bless the world would come to fulfillment here, at this heavenly party.

Are we going to miss Nina? Sure we are. We're going to miss her presence and her parties and her love. But we trust that because of Jesus' death and resurrection, she has gone on ahead. She's sitting at Jesus' table of love. And she's having more fun at this party than we could possibly know. Amen.