

Funeral – Tom Manske
April 16, 2011
Zumbro Lutheran Church
Pastor Vern Christopherson

Donna, Shawn, Staci, Jill, 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.

My heart goes out to the family this day. As if one loss isn't enough, you've had two: a father and a son. And just a few hours apart. I can only imagine how difficult this must be. I'm thankful you have each other for support and encouragement. I'm thankful you have the prayers and hugs of all who are gathered here today. And most of all, I'm thankful that God promises to walk with you in every time of trouble.

The biblical book of Philippians is filled with deep gratitude. The book is actually a letter written by the Apostle Paul to the young church in Philippi. Paul says to them: "Beloved, whatever is true, what is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you."

When I sat down with Donna and Jill to plan for today, I asked them what adjectives they would use to describe Tom. They said: kind, patient, virtuous, loving, caring, compassionate, and supportive. And then they brought up this passage from Philippians. Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is pure and pleasing and commendable—they said—Tom lived these qualities everyday. He was full of positive thoughts and energy.

Of course, sometimes one's enthusiasm for life can come out sideways. Tom was a big teaser. He teased so much, in fact, that his niece, Michelle, wasn't always sure if he liked her or not. Michelle's mom had to assure her that he actually liked her a lot. This was just his way of showing affection.

Many of Tom's positive traits came from his boyhood home. Tom was born in 1931 in Robbinsdale to Reinhardt and May Manske. The country was in the heart of the Great Depression. Everyone was struggling to make ends meet. Reinhardt worked for

the post office. May was both a mom and a foster mom. The biggest influence in Tom's life by far was May. Over the years she was a foster mom to more than 200 kids, many of them with special needs. May poured her heart and soul into those kids. If anything, she cared too much for them and wound up getting overly attached. From time to time, state authorities had to take some of the kids away.

May was a strong woman. In the midst of her caretaking, she managed to raise four children of her own. She had a big heart. Tom learned from her a number of life lessons: empathy for people, concern for the world, and a healthy dose of humility in helping others.

Tom went to school in North Minneapolis. He grew up a Catholic. He attended Delasalle High School for a year. It was an all-boys school. Tom wasn't crazy about being there. He managed to get himself expelled for smoking on school grounds. Tom spent the rest of his high school years at Patrick Henry. Football occupied a lot of his attention. He lost a couple of front teeth playing the game. Tom wasn't especially serious about the academic side of things. He loved learning, but he wasn't all that enamored with going to school.

After graduating from high school, Tom tried to enlist in the Marines. He flunked the eye exam, however, and ended up in the Air Force instead. He was stationed in Morocco for a couple of years. He was fascinated with the Moroccan people and culture. He learned as much as he could while he was there. He always hoped to go back someday, but like a lot of things in life, it was not meant to be.

When Tom returned to the States, he enrolled at St. Cloud State. He was going to become a teacher. The qualities were definitely there: empathy, concern, humility, a heart for children. Still, some of the same patterns emerged that were present in high school: Tom loved to learn, but he wasn't fond of attending classes and doing homework. Then he met Deedee. Before long they were married and starting a family. Scott was born. Then along came Shawn and Staci. Tom dropped out of school to support his family.

Tom worked at any number of jobs in his life. He sold insurance. He owned a bar. He worked for a bread company. Finally he settled in at Red Dot Potato Chips. According to Jill, he worked hard at these jobs, but he didn't necessarily love them. His

life was defined by things other than work. Eventually Red Dot was bought out by Frito Lay, which led to a transfer of Tom and family to Rochester.

Of course, even the most positive guy is going to have some trips through the valley. Tom ended up getting a divorce from Deedee. Scott was living on his own by then. Shawn and Staci went with their mother to live in Arizona. Tom did what he could to stay in touch, but it wasn't easy. Those relationships would have to be tended to later in life.

A few years down the road, Tom got a second chance at love. Ironically, it happened on the last day of school, and with a teacher, no less. Donna and some teacher friends had gone out for a drink at Howard Johnson's. Tom was there with a group of his buddies. Somebody knew someone at the other table. They ended up moving the tables together. Tom and Donna weren't exactly sitting side by side, but they noticed each other. Afterward, according to Donna, she "stalked him down." They ended up having a gourmet meal together at Tom's apartment: peanut butter & jelly sandwiches.

They were married in October, during MEA week. They honeymooned on the North Shore. Afterward they moved into a townhome. Jill came along. Eventually the family found a little plot of land to build a home on the hills above Oronoco.

As Jill sees it, she "hit the dad lottery." Tom and Donna were her loudest cheerleaders at soccer games and school events. They went on family vacations to places like Mackinaw Island, Buffalo, New York, and Santa Barbara, California. Mom and dad went to visit Jill when she lived in Nicaragua for a semester and when she worked for the Peace Corp in Ecuador.

Jill recalls how much Tom enjoyed having family and friends at the house. It didn't matter if it was college friends, extended family, or Venezuelan friends, Tom's words were always the same: "Invite them all." As people gathered, Tom could be found lighting a fire by the pool, putting on a favorite CD, or just sitting and chatting with the guests. He loved nothing more than welcoming people into his home and making room for them.

In his retirement years, Tom really seemed to flourish. He drove school bus and loved every minute of his time with the kids. When his eyesight got too bad to drive, he worked as a teacher's aide in a class with disadvantaged kids. He and Donna spent a

month or two in Arizona during the winter. In the last six years, Tom even saw the light and became a Lutheran.

Undoubtedly, the onset of Parkinson's was hard for Tom. He managed to stay busy. He was able to keep playing golf. But it got harder and harder in the last year or so. On top of everything, Tom found out that Scott had cancer. The prognosis wasn't good. These two had been close over the years. Both Tom and Scott did what they could to support each other along the way.

Somehow, though it all, Tom didn't complain. He continued to live Paul's words: "Whatever is true, what is honorable, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable...think about these things." That was Tom. He was positive right up to the end.

We are soon entering the holiest week of the church year. Tomorrow is Palm Sunday, when we remember Jesus' fateful ride into Jerusalem. On Thursday, we'll recall his last supper with the disciples, and on Friday, his long and agonizing death on the cross. As we say goodbye to Tom and Scott, we are painfully aware that we live in a Friday sort of world. It's a world of brokenness and sorrow and death. But perhaps, in the midst of the pain, we are able to hear a word of hope. Indeed, God promises that because of Jesus, nothing in all the world, not even death, can separate us from God's love.

We live in a Friday sort of world...it's true. But Sunday is coming. And Sunday is resurrection and life and joy. Amen.