

In Memory of Clarence A. Lebsack
Eulogy by Lyle Dean Lebsack
Sermon by Rev. Ivan Rundus
December 18, 1991

On behalf of my Mother, my sister Sharon, and my brothers Tom and Steve, thank you for coming. Your presence is both a comfort to us and a tribute to Dad. The outpouring of love and affection for him and for our family is very much appreciated.

He may have been your friend or neighbor. Or both. In some ways, you may have known him better than those of us who have been away from Sterling for some years. But in addition to being your friend and neighbor, he was husband, father, grandfather, brother, and uncle. Not out of the ordinary in terms of range of relationships, but with qualities that made him extraordinary in a number of ways. You have expressed that eloquently and we have been touched by your cards, your comments, and your comfort.

I know this is a sad time and there have been lots of tears, but this is also a thanksgiving for a life of goodness that touched so many people in so many ways. I hope a few recollections will bring a smile through the tears.

Some feelings are hard to put into words. Our daughter, Kirsten, called from college several weeks ago. She was writing a paper about our family. One of her questions was, "what are our family values?" I think I know what they are. I know they are good values. But every attempt to verbalize them brought thoughts of how Dad had handled one or more situations. By the way, the first family value to come to mind was not the first one I learned--a strong work ethic. My brother, Tom, observed that Dad, too, may have had difficulty putting certain values into words. To our remembering, he never talked about honesty, and integrity, but they were clearly values he lived every day. To some it was his kindness. And to a number of you, it was his sense of humor and seemingly inexhaustable supply of funny stories.

Not the first recollection, but one that remained vivid with me was while remodeling a house on McKinley street. I was in about the sixth grade and Dad was instructing me on how to use the new power table saw safely. The whirling blade of the saw was just slightly higher than the piece of wood he was running across it, causing the blade to cut into his thumb. Without a gasp or a swear word, he turned and calmly said, "that is how not to do it."

We were always amazed at his ability to build things, or adapt things, to meet the need at hand. Much of his woodwork was with oak, perhaps for its strength and enduring beauty. Symbolic of our memories of him.

To all of us, the visits from him and Mom were always events to look forward to, In part, because it usually meant he was bringing something of wood he had made of refinished--and both Sharons in the family came to rely on his visits to fix things and install things.

And when children and grandchildren came home, he was clearly happy to have us.

In one visit to Hattiesburg, Mississippi, Sharon took Dad with her to the local Dodge dealer, introducing him as the person who told her by phone what was wrong with her van so she could tell the dealer. The service manager's response--Dad's been right every time!

Dad was fond of stopping to talk to occupants of any car with an Illinois license plate who came through Sterling, asking them if they knew his son, a newscaster in Chicago. It wasn't that many knew of me, as was the number of phone calls I got, which started by saying, "You don't know me, but I met your Father..."

As further proof of things a father will do for his children, he and Mom became rabid sports fans when Steve played high school basketball at Merino; and when Sharon performed in the orchestra at Greeley, he even became an opera buff. And as Earl Sandstead can tell you, that was not easy!

Mom says his concern for farmers and their crops was always strong, but even more so in the years after he lost daily touch with them at the store. After retirement, they would take rides into the country to check on crops, rainfall and, all too often, hail damage.

Words cannot describe his relationship with his grandchildren. We know you've lost a special friend and our hearts go out to you, but keep in mind another granddaughter has been waiting for him.

Some other remembrances: That his smile came easy and was genuine. So was his love of country. He realized that its fate and the fates of his children would have been much different if his father had not had the courage and foresight to come to America.

Those of you who talked to him in the last few months know that despite his pain and suffering, he was not giving up, even though he knew what the final outcome would be. Through the pain, he kept his sense of humor for visitors and he kept his dignity but late last week, a comment he made to Sharon may have held more meaning than we attached to it at the time. He said simply, "I'd like to go home." We have no doubt that he has.

“And they shall be mine saith the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I shall make them my Jewels.”

As I remembered Clarence, a whole truck-load of memories raced through my mind. This man was a member of the Pulpit Nominating Committee that brought Agnes and myself here to be the Pastor of this church some 21 years ago. He and Esther were one among several, who entertained us in their home and made us not only feel welcome, but that God surely was calling us to come here as the Minister of the Word and Sacrament to this congregation.

As the years rolled by, Clarence and Esther included our family with their family gatherings many times over, until we almost felt that we belonged to Clarence and Esther as part of their family circle. Always and again, I was asking him about things in terms of making our grass grow greener, our shrubs to keep from dying, what kind of bug spray to use, etc. But most of all, Clarence was a friend. And friends, good friends like Clarence, are so hard to find that you just plain hate to let them go. He was not a fair-weather friend who was in a relationship for good times and then disappeared when things got tough. No, he took the good with the bad. He was not a friend who was interested in what he could get out of the friendship--Clarence was the kind of person who would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it and then complain if it didn't fit! While he was on the Session, although he had a definite element of stubbornness Clarence was not afraid to try something new or different or to take a chance on something that was being suggested.

Clarence was a craftsman when it came to furniture or anything made of wood. You cannot walk around this church and not see something that he hasn't made, repaired, or refinished. When our grandson needed a place to mount his electric train, Clarence made the most amazing platform for it--so that it has a small village and things that go with electric train models. All of these things plus the times we spent at Steamboat watching hot air balloons and sight seeing in that beautiful country: the good times Agnes and I had with Clarence and Esther: and at the family Lebsack baptism dinners. And again the list could go on and all of these things and more make me wonder how in the world you say "good-bye" to a friend like Clarence.

But we aren't the first people to have this problem. On the way to Jerusalem, knowing what was going to happen to him, Jesus thought about his friends. I can picture Him struggling with the knowledge of his coming death and the need to prepare his disciples (friends) for it. How will they handle the pain of my death? How in the world, he must have wondered, would He say good-bye to them. Finally, he said it about as clearly as He could: “In my Father's house are many rooms. I go to prepare a place for you.” And there really are two important lessons to be learned from this 14th Chapter of St. John. The first is that saying good-bye is very hard. Our emotions are such that we do not handle this very well, especially when we are saying "good-bye" to a special friend. We feel a sense of injustice. The world seems out-of-joint and it hurts. The second lesson from Jesus' experience that speaks to me personally the most is this: The answer to the question “How do you say good-bye to a friend?” is simply that you cannot.

I am not even going to try to do it. I think that Jesus, realizing that his disciples would never understand him, said it in the only way that makes any sense at all: "I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you may be also." It is not good-bye; it is nothing less than a reminder to us that there are not good-byes.

That is the absolutely amazing gift that Jesus gave to us, and to Clarence: the simple yet mind-boggling conviction that there are only what the preacher Peter Marshall said to his wife as they took him to the hospital after his heart-attack late in the afternoon--he said to Katherine, "I'll see you in the morning!" But he died during the night and she remembered the great hymn which sings "We'll say good night here, but good morning up there!" That is what we have--the "see you in the mornings." And we thank God for that, even as we now give Clarence over to that dawn. So we come to know that death is an appointment made for us by God. We are the expected people in the Father's House.

Now I began this sermon with the words from Malachi: "*And they shall be mine says the Lord of Hosts, in that day when I shall make them my Jewels.*" And I have tried to say that Clarence has been a most valuable person to his family, of course, and friends, and his commitment to his church made him one of its most faithful supporters. But now he has become of those who is one of the Jewels in the Kingdom of God. So we have come this morning not really to say "Good-Bye!", but rather to remember this good man's time among us--and the words from somewhere came to me: "We loved him well--he gave us joy!" And that he did. Dan Valentine wrote an American essay based on a letter a man wrote to his family to be opened after his death. Let me share parts of it with you:

Dear Loved Ones:

I hope by now that some of the initial shock of my departure has begun to wear away ... and that the kind carpet of pleasant memories has started to unroll.

I only ask one thing: No sad tears for me, please.

Every wonderful, delightful thrill, experience and emotion life has to offer has been mine.

So, no sad tears for me please.

Rather, recall me with a fond smile as the husband and father and friend who shared your laughter, tears, and dreams through the years...

Save your sadness and sorrow for those who go before their time, for those who leave before they taste all the fine wines of the world.

No sad tears for me, please.

I lived a goodly span of years--and enjoyed them all.

I've laughed a lot cried a little...I've seen a thousand sunsets and a few fresh dawns, walked in April rain...and watched and ocean roll...

I loved a woman and was loved in return...I've cradled a daughter in my arms and walked with the hands of young sons in my own

Life was good...I saw robins in the spring...watched a shooting star or two...enjoyed the snows of winter, walked wider a harvest moon...and stood a time or two on top of a high hill and watched the flickering lights of a town.

No sad tears for me, please.

Think of the happy times: The Christmas mornings...the grandsons...the graduations...the weddings...the Thanksgiving dinners...the carefree vacations...and, most of all, remember the thousands of times we were all together as a family.

No sad tears for me, please.

For no man dies as long as there is one person left in the living world who remembers him with fond recall...and shares a thought with him...though he has gone ahead.

On Christmas Eve, if there is a small star in the sky, took at it with love and let it come into your heart...and remember me.

A man really never dies while there are those on earth who loved him....A man is never gone as long as there are those who remember him with fondness...and as long as his memory evokes a wistful smile.

All who have loved, and who have been loved have earned a piece of immortality....

No sad tears for me, please....

And St. Paul said it like this:

Finally, brethren, what ever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do: and the God of peace will be with you.

These words would be, I believe, a legacy from Clarence to you his family and to us his friends.