**Philippians 4:4-9 May 30, 2021 (Morris Armbruster Funeral)**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ but especially to you the family and friends of Morris Armbruster,

He’s not here. Which is why we are gathered today. He hasn’t gone missing, it’s not a mystery what happened to him, but still we are gathered in this service of celebration and we are faced with the reality, right before your very own eyes this afternoon, he’s not here. His body isn’t even here. So what are we doing here? Have we come to sulk, cry, and despair in our sorrow over the loss of our dear brother in Christ? Have we come to simply share memories while eating some refreshments under a tent in a parking lot? No. That’s not the only reason you’ve come. You’ve come to be reminded of that truth, what I said at the very beginning. He’s not here, and that’s a good thing.

I’ll tell you why. In my life I have to make a confession to you, something personal about myself that perhaps is different from your experiences or perhaps this is true for you as well. I have never attended homecoming as an alumni. I’ve never been back. Not to my high school of Valley Lutheran in Saginaw Michigan or my undergraduate College of Concordia University Wisconsin. I never made a homecoming. Didn’t see the game, didn’t see the homecoming court, didn’t see my past classmates and share memories together. A part of it was I never really lived near those places after I graduated and it would involve quite a trip, another was, and this is my personal confession to you this day, I never wanted to go back. I didn’t know if I’d see the people who were special to me at that event and if they weren’t there then all there would be was the memories. The memories were special and wonderful, but there also would come the truth that they were just that, memories, that couldn’t possibly be replicated again. That time had past, and there wasn’t much comfort in that.

Sadly, in our lives, especially in the eyes of the world that’s all a funeral, a memorial service, a service of remembrance or even a service of celebration can end up being. Memories. Nostalgia. Looking back on pictures of Dad or mom, or your lost loved one and having a few laughs and shedding a few tears over a cup of coffee, some cookies, even a light meal, a time of family reuniting and seeing each other again to say goodbye to this particular member of it, and that’s it. We’ll always have the memories and this is the time to share them. The present pain isn’t worth dwelling on, the pain of grief and recovery over the loss of your loved one, and the future is barely discussed, after all, they aren’t here. They are gone. What does the future have to do with them? But that’s the difference for you today, as you remember Morris. I won’t in any way stop you from going back and sharing memories of his life and his amazing accomplishments, of financial advice he gave you, of his memories shared of time on the farm, of the joys of traveling and seeing the world, of remembering your place in his life and his journey and celebrating the wonderful life that he was blessed to have, that’s not my intention at all. But here, right now, in God’s house, I’m here to talk to you about the present. And not just dwell on the fact that he’s not here, and that his body isn’t here, but to dwell on the truth that there are better places to be than here, and he’s there.

It is in the resurrection account of Luke, in chapter 24 where the two men who appear standing in dazzling white say to the women, “Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day, rise.” I urge you in the same way, do not seek the living among the dead. Do not give in only to memories of Morris’s past, and neglect to think of his present circumstances today. Because while his body is not with us, his soul is with the Lord, in a joy that surpasses any experience you had with him here on Earth, and that is something to celebrate together, in a service of celebration, with beautiful music and favorite hymns. That is something to sit together and remember with smiles amidst tears of grief because he’s not here in a valley of pain, and sorrow, and sin, and disease, where division and problems seem to arise new every day. He is in peace. He is strong again and happy. He is singing praises to the Lord with all those who have gone before him, and we join in that song here in God’s house when we sing the Sanctus, “with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven.” When we rejoice, as it says in Philippians 4:4, always. “Rejoice in the Lord, always. I will say it again: Rejoice!” Yes even today. And in the days of rejoicing and gladness that are to come, on celebrations where Morris would be present, and yet won’t be. Not in the same way he could have been. There can be rejoicing because of the life he has through the death and resurrection of God’s own Son, who knew Morris and loved Morris and who Morris was united with through the waters of Holy Baptism.

I treasure the memories I have of bringing Morris communion. Of our conversations, of picking his brain about the state of the Michigan District today and how he saw changes in the church over his years. I treasure the times when I was able to talk to him about driving through the Sebewaing area on the way up to the cottage that my mother’s side of the family used to own in Caseville, Michigan. I treasure the conversations about his past, and his wife Mary Lou, and how much he loved and was still knowledgeable about what was going on in the lives of his family. I treasure those teaching moments for me in learning how a man was able to use his God given talents for the service of the church. And it is in those memories, that I will think of Morris’s confirmation verse and how those memories of Him can still point to Christ even while he is no longer present with us, but is present with our Lord and Savior. Philippians 4:8, “Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things.” Even on a day of sadness and grief, think on the good because that’s all that Morris knows now. The truth of his Savior and the Scriptures that he was taught and still read even to the end of his days here on Earth. He knows only the noble, the right, the pure, the lovely, the admirable, the excellent and praiseworthy, and his reality now, is that he only experiences and thinks on those things. This verse, that guided him in his life, is now his reality. That’s what he’s experiencing where he is, and while the truth that he’s not here brings us grief, the truth that he’s somewhere better must bring us peace and comfort in the midst of our sorrow.

The final words for you this afternoon, are to take that next verse after Morris’s confirmation verse, and while these words were written by Paul to the Church in Philippi I ask that you make them applicable to your memories of Morris. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.” He’s not here, bodily, his soul is with the Lord and you have nothing to fear about him and what he’s experiencing. But when you go to the places he was, and when places, or foods, or pictures, music, or traditions remind you of him, that’s when he’s still with you, in your heart and in your mind. Still teaching you as your father, your family member, your friend, your brother in Christ. That’s his homecoming to you, and not just in such a way that you have to dwell on his passing, but in that moment, may that memory turn you to the God of peace who will be with you and give you comfort in the days, the weeks, the months, and the years to come as you remember Morris and where he is now.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.