

Funeral Sermon for Dan Haverkamp
July 28, 2011 at San José, Costa Rica

Praise be to God for the life of Dan Haverkamp, a saint in the Kingdom of God, and of Christ's church, who lived a wonderful and grace-filled life. Though it would seem that we are gathered here because he has died, it is in fact because he has lived, and lived well, that we are here to worship God and to remember him and to proclaim the love of the Christ whom Dan knew and served. Though it is difficult to gather to say our final farewell, it is a necessary thing, and thanks be to God that God has given us a way to do that. Through prayer, through song, through Scripture, through each other, we are given a way to appropriately remember Dan Haverkamp's life among us, and, in that mysterious and ironic way that perhaps only Christians can, to celebrate even in the midst of what hurts us to the core. We can celebrate the incomparable love of God, a love so strong that nothing can overcome it or separate us from it in our Lord Jesus Christ. God's goodness, God's love for us, and the life we shared with Dan, are certainly cause for celebration.

But as we are gathered, we are confronted with the reality that Dan is no longer with us, that he *has* died, that he now abides with us in our memories, if not at our sides. Our own mortality comes to the fore, reminding us that even though our days in God's hands are too numerous to count, our days enjoying one another's company are indeed finite. We grieve, we lament, we weep, and we mourn, and all of these are not only perfectly appropriate, but indeed God's gifts to

us, and to be expected as we live the days following the death of someone we love. We are human beings after all, finite and confounded by death, seeking comfort as we grieve.

As we grieve, Thomas's question in the reading from John's Gospel, "How can we know the way," is one we might be asking of ourselves as we think about the future without our brother, our uncle, our friend, our companion in Christ. Our lives are different, our routines are disrupted. Our meals with Dan have finished. Our visits to the hospital have come to an end. We will need to find a new pianist and vice-president and Mission Committee co-chair for the church. Each of us has known Dan in a certain way, and that way is no longer open to us. We are now being asked to go somewhere we never really considered going, and a place we've certainly never been. We feel lost before we even begin the journey. And so we ask, "God, how can we know the way?" In the story, Thomas thinks Jesus is talking about a location, a place to which he and the other disciples might travel and stay the night, taking shelter from the desert sun in a cool, multi-roomed suite. And so he asks the Lord for directions, that they might not become lost. But Jesus is speaking a different language completely and answers in a manner which must have utterly mystified the disciples. "I am the way," he says. Jesus responds to Thomas's geography question with a relational answer, and provides us with a clue that the answer to how we will find our way without Dan Haverkamp is related to his relationship, and to our relationships, with Jesus Christ, for he is the way. We

will carry on without him because we trust in the promises that we all have one Father, in whose spiritual house we each have a dwelling place. We will go on knowing that Dan is in but another room in that mansion, perhaps behind a door now closed, but not very far away, at least not in God's way of keeping house. And though we might picture it as a house with rooms and doors and maybe even curtained windows, he has gone where we cannot quite imagine, no matter how the painters paint it, or the poets describe it, and which is nowhere we can easily go. But it is the same place that Jesus told his disciples that he was going, and that they too would be going, and that we too one day will go, following the way Jesus has laid before us.

The Apostle Paul may have written nothing more amazing than what we heard from his letter to the Romans. With wonderful language and images, he reminds us of the amazing scope of God's love in Christ and that nothing can separate us from that love. But what is very curious about his list of those things which are powerless to stop God's love, is that Paul lists "life." *Life* is powerless to separate us from God's love. Death can't do it, life can't do it. It's a strange thing to include but I think by saying such a thing Paul means to tell us that God is concerned with our lives in the here and now as well as with our souls when we die. God knew each of us before we were born and God is with us right now. Friends, death has not separated Dan from God's love in Christ Jesus, and neither has life separated us from God's love in Christ Jesus because we remain behind.

We are comforted in the knowledge that Dan remains loved by God despite death and we are able to go forward because we remain loved despite life which seems emptier without him. This is the resurrection of Jesus Christ in a nutshell, for in Christ's rising from the grave, life, just like death, life too is transformed.

Abundant life in the here and now for we who remain, and life beyond life for Dan — these are the wondrous promises made in the resurrection of our Lord and Savior. This good news makes it possible for us, even in the midst of our grief, to see hope and to gather in celebration of the love and life God has given us in Christ.

As we heard in the letter from Dan's sister, Katie, Dan was working on a book about Costa Rica, and loved languages. However, not only was he a writer and a speaker, but also an avid reader, and one of his favorite authors was the great essayist and children's book author, E.B. White. Although E.B. White was not known as a poet, he did write a least one poem appropriate for this occasion that I think Dan might appreciate. It is called *The Spider's Web* and it goes like this:

The spider, dropping down from twig,
Unfolds a plan of her devising,
A thin premeditated rig
To use in rising.

And all that journey down through space,
In cool descent and loyal hearted,
She spins a ladder to the place
From where she started.

Thus I, gone forth as spiders do
In spider's web a truth discerning,
Attach one silken thread to you
For my returning.

Dan has indeed returned from whence he came, using the silken thread he attached to God for that journey. That silken thread is the love of God in Jesus Christ, and there is nothing that can break it, not even in the greatest tempests of life. Rather, it gleams in the sunlight and dew, giving us hope for our inevitable returnings. May we each grab hold of that silken thread as we climb toward God.

Let us pray: Grant rest eternal, unto Dan, O Lord, and may light perpetual shine upon him. May his soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, rest in peace. Amen.