

Sermon for the Christian Burial of Donald Eugene "Pete" Minnich
* - 23.ii.2007
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church
Wednesday, 28.ii.07, 10:00 a.m.
Ecclesiastes 3; Psalm 23; John 14:1-6; Matthew 11:25-30

J. J.!

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who
was and Who is to come! ✠ Amen.

“ . . . and you will find rest for your souls.”

-- Matthew 11:29b

Rest was something Pete Minnich needed after many a hard day of work at the factory, something he found in other work, home on his farm with Ethel and their children. Helping plants and animals to grow, and in that way also helping yet more to provide for his family, was part of the great joy Pete had in this life

which he gratefully received from the hand of his Creator, a life we now obediently return to that same One Who gives, redeems and guides all the living. There is a German saying, "Out of his work, I could make a vacation." Out of what is in fact hard and exacting physical work, Pete knew how to draw rest that created his life anew and helped others.

To this strong yet gentle man another kind of work came naturally. He knew how to welcome the stranger, how to make the newcomer feel a part of his family, whether that was the large family he and Ethel raised together—never at crossed purposes, a family they were blessed to see flourish—or whether that was his Church family, here. I know, because he

welcomed me when Ellen and I first came here and on many a Sunday thereafter.

He welcomed with a handshake and a smile, with talk about trout fishing or talk about baseball. He gloried in companionship, both human and animal. He shared in the joy of creation and made others glad to be alive, if only for the brief span that is ours on this side of eternity. Even having to cope with the inconvenience and discomfort of kidney dialysis, Pete bore this with dignity for five long years and expressed to me his gratitude to God for this gift of medical science. One of his dialysis nurses described Pete to me as "our very best patient."

Pete did all of these things well, and many more, I am sure. But there a problem can arise

when we approach this moment, a moment when each of us shall surely stand before God. A person who is by nature ornery, selfish and undisciplined, practiced in meanness of all sorts look upon even a single kind act as a kind of achievement if, finally, the Holy Spirit breaks through all that to reveal what the Apostle Paul calls in I Corinthians "a more excellent way," a way of life lived under God's grace and open toward others. But Pete lived his whole life that way. He lived as the child of God he became in Holy Baptism. Whether he talked about it much or not, I do not know, but the way of Christ was obviously the only way he knew how to live, the only life he thought was worth living. Goodness, lovingkindness came easy

to Pete, so easy in fact that, at the last he might ask himself, "Did I do enough? Did I love enough?"

That is a very good question, a question we who are Lutheran Christians pose to ourselves regularly in the general confession of sin when we confess that we have sinned against God "in thought, word and deed, by what we have done *and by what we have left undone.*" Surely Pete could have done more, on at least one day, in at least one hour of his life. Surely *you and I have not done enough,* surely we have loved others where it is convenient and turned our backs on them where it is not. Surely what we have left undone amounts to more than we have done for the glory and love of God in Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther was driven to embrace the monastic life by just that question, but he found no certainty. His father had wanted him to be a lawyer, and perhaps some day a great magistrate. Could he not have done more good in that way of life than as a monk devoted to God in prayer, or as a priest proclaiming God's Word and giving Christ to the people in the Sacraments, or as a professor of theology, preparing new leaders for the Church, clarifying and defending her doctrine. Which path was the right one? And how, Luther asked, can I be sure in any single act of goodness that I am serving God and not my own ego and the devil? Such a question terrifies the conscience and can drive one *away* from God and *into* an eternal madness.

It is best to deal with this question in the midst of life rather than at its end. But how? Is it not the devil's own question to us at the end of each day: 'But how do you *know* you have lived as a child of God, and not for your own selfish will?' In the midst of our life and our world, Almighty God chose to answer the devil's question for us, once and for all. That is our faith, the faith into which the Church baptizes us, the faith by which Donald Eugene Minnich lived, quietly, joyfully and peacefully.

The Father answers the devil's question by sending His only Son, born of Mary, of our flesh and blood, One Who *was* obedient to the Father's will in all things, One Who followed where the Holy Spirit led, to the neighbor in need, to face the implacable

powers of this world with His Word of truth, and even to pay for that obedient loved with His own innocent suffering and death. In Christ, humanity's debt of obedience to God was paid. By faith alone we are able to put the question that accuses us to rest and to live in peace before God now and at the hour of our death.

But Jesus did not heal all the sick, feed all the hungry or speak truth to all those in power, either then or now. Instead, Our Lord called into being a great family, His Church, through which the Father's great love for the world is to be accomplished until the end of time. In Pete, on the day of his Baptism, Christ called forth a life through which many would know the joy and peace of God's love. Through those

many he loved, whose lives he made more bearable and even joyful, may his life and the love that created and redeemed it be magnified each new day! ✠ Amen.



Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, Our LORD. ✠ Amen.

