

All Saints' Sunday – November 2, 2008
The Rev. Dr. Charles D. Bang

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

I was invited to preside at the wedding of Tim Roets and Amanda Raynor yesterday. For those of you who do not know these two, Tim is the son of Noreen Casson, brother of Beth Hill, uncle of Jonathon, Kelsi and Barbara Hopkins.

The wedding was held at the Peek and Peak Resort, about 25 miles west of Jamestown. It was a great day, and I was honored to participate in it. As the site was 100 miles away, and the rehearsal was held the night before, the family put me up in the hotel there overnight. For most weddings, I rarely attend both the rehearsal dinner and the reception, usually opting for one or the other, but as I was in residence there, so to speak, I attended both. The most fun, of course, and as usual, was the rehearsal dinner. And this one did not disappoint. It was a great evening of reminiscing, roasting, story telling, (some of it embarrassing) and in general great family fun.

The evening started out with the bride, Amanda, telling stories about her family, and giving all of us some insight into the pride and peculiarities of those with whom she grew up. That was followed by her sisters, telling Amanda stories, and giving thanks to Tim for taking her off their hands.

It was then the groom's turn. His favorite uncle started the story telling. He told the story of how he went to visit Tim one weekend where he was stationed. As they approached the main gate to the base, he was duly impressed when the Marine Guard standing there snapped to attention and saluted his nephew, who held the rank of Captain. As he watched his nephew receiving this gesture of respect, he said he couldn't help but remember an incident in Tim childhood that flashed before his eyes at that very moment. He told those gathered that when Tim was a very young boy he had a bad habit of not flushing the toilet. And one weekend when he was visiting the family, Tim's brother and sister asked Uncle Ted if he could have a talk with Tim because Tim loved and respected him so. So that day, he called Tim into the bathroom, grabbed the boy by his heels, and started lowering him head first, into the un-flushed toilet as a way of cementing

in the young boy's mind, what he should have done in the first place and hopefully will now always do in the future.

He said it was an odd mix of images, and that he hoped the beauty of the wedding the next day might eventually replace them.

I turned to Tim and said the reason why so many people wind up in my study for counseling, comes from having families like his.

One of the most touching moments came near the end of the testimonials when the Bride, Amanda, gave gifts to her parents. One of Amanda's most enduring memories of her childhood came from the fact that her parents owned a farm and had a habit of planting trees, whenever and wherever they could. She also had not so fond memories of her parents gathering their three girls together in the early spring, when the ground was still cold and muddy to plant hundreds of saplings on the property. But over the years, she confessed, the trees they planted played significant parts in their lives. There were trees that brought to

mind memories of family events, of first kisses, and even as the place where the family spread the ashes of the family matriarch who first bought the property generations before.

As her parents opened their gifts, what was revealed was a beautiful set of wooden candlesticks and an ornately carved wooden candle stand.

Last Christmas, Tim, the groom, surprised his fiancée, with a lathe, something she had always wanted, after having gone to a Home Depot demonstration some months before. Amanda went on to tell her parents where the gifts came from. Her mom's candle holder, was made by Amanda, on her new lathe, from the tree under whose canopy her mother's mother's ashes were spread so many years before. Her father's, came from the black walnut tree that he made his daughters plant nearly thirty years ago on that muddy spring morning. And the larger candle stand, was made from the Cherry tree that her father had cut down years before with his first chain saw, an event which caused the tree to fall on the power lines to the house, ripping down the pole, the lines and the transformer hanging there on.

In its simplest and yet most profound sense, this is what All Saints' Day is all about. That we gather to acknowledge and celebrate the fact that who we are, who we have become, and who we will yet be, are all inextricably bound to those who have come before us as well as to the one who is the Creator of all.

We are not alone, nor have we ever been, we are, as St. Paul said, surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, and God is always there. In the still small voice of both remembrance and reason, in the pillar of cloud which is our awareness of sin and our need for God and the pillar of fire which is the conscience and compass that guides and directs us.

In the Lutheran tradition, we do not pray for the dead, we pray instead that they be remembered and we commend them to God's eternal keeping. We don't pray for them because they have no need for our prayers, they rest in God's keeping and no better place could be either wished or prayed for. We light a candle, we say a prayer recalling them to memory, and we offer thanks for who they were and what they did and for that sacred part of each of them that resides in us.

And at the last, we pray that how we live our lives will honor the legacy that they have bequeathed to us, because all we have is what we have either inherited from them or borrowed from our children in hopes of returning it in better condition than we received it.

And so, as we pray for those who have entered the church triumphant this past year as well as those who remain forever in our hearts, think on these things.

¹³Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" ¹⁴I said to him, "Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

¹⁵For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them.

¹⁶They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat;

¹⁷for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Thanks be to God for all the saints.

Amen.