



LUTHERAN
CHURCH OF **HOPE**

By Pastor Merv Thompson

Pastor's Update

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"Jesus said, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.'" John 11:25-26.

How relevant were the words which Pastor Mike was speaking all throughout Lent and Easter, words about resurrection, about eternal life, about Jesus victory over sin, death and the power of evil. How appropriate the words of Rick Warren in Purpose-Driven Life about this life being just a prologue, an introduction, eternity is the goal. For just after worship concluded this past Sunday, Pastor Mike and Sally received word that Mike's father had died. Even though he had battled Parkinson's disease for 19 years, there was no indication that death was near. So it was very difficult news to hear.

The obituary gave the following description. Pastor J. Thomas Housholder was born January 18, 1934, in Bellingham Washington. He moved to Ketchikan, Alaska as a child, where he met his future wife of 46 years, Delphine. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in 1956 from Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, WA, and a Master of Theology in 1960 from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

He was a gifted preacher, writer and innovative church leader with a passion for evangelism. He served as pastor of Ascension Lutheran Church in Orofino, Idaho from 1960-1964; Faith Lutheran Church in Kamiah, Idaho, 1964-1971; Redeemer Lutheran Church in Great Falls, Montana, 1971-1975. From 1975-1979, Pastor Housholder was the Director of Evangelism for the American Lutheran Church, living in Minneapolis. In 1979, he became senior pastor of Edison Park Lutheran Church in Chicago, Ill. During retirement he also served Faith Lutheran Church in Prairie Village, Kansas.

Tom was an unconventional pastor and colorful personality, a blessing to his family, friends and someone who glorified God in his daily life. Survivors include his loving wife, Delphine; three sons and six grandchildren: Pastor David (Wendy) and their son, Lars, Huntington Beach, CA; Pastor Michael (Sally) and their children, Jonathan, Daniel, and Kristin,

West Des Moines, IA; Pastor Timothy (Kathy) and their children, Andrew and Lauryn, Woodbury, MN.

An overflow congregation gathered together at Overland Park Lutheran Church in Overland Park, Kansas this past Wednesday to celebrate the life of Pastor Tom and to comfort and support his family. With banners in the front heralding the Easter message "Behold I Make All Things New" and "New Life," the gathered community worshipped and sang, prayed and confessed our faith, and listened to stirring testimonies both to the life and ministry of Tom as well as to the power and grace of God.

The pastor of the congregation, Pastor Jim Beaty, and also Tom's pastor, knew him well and shared many personal remembrances. He talked about how fitting it was that Tom died on a Sunday morning, and that he died on a Sunday morning when the focus is on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Tom always was in church and this particular Sunday he stayed home because of illness, but he did not miss worship. He is now worshipping in that heavenly congregation.

Pastor Tom was an evangelist. He had a passion for those who did know Jesus Christ. He would come to church early when he was a pastor and often would stand outside the church and pray, "Lord, bring them in. Lord, bring them in." Tom loved preaching, he was always at his best in the pulpit, always felt closest to God when he was proclaiming the Gospel. He was a consummate story teller, loved to tell stories. In every sermon he wanted to challenge people to repent and believe in Jesus, to be renewed by the grace and love of God. He always wanted to bring people to a place where they could make a decision to follow Jesus, and then he challenged people to become evangelists.

Pastor Tom had a terrific sense of humor, he was always doing practical jokes. Nobody ever quite knew what Tom was going to do next, he was unpredictable. But, Pastor Beaty said, Tom was always supportive of other pastors, always positive and forward looking.

Near the end of the service, a friend of the family brought the book which Tom had written and read some excerpts. All of this gave the congregation a wonderful understanding of the life and passions and faith of Tom Housholder.

Tom told about the time when he was Director of Evangelism for the ALC when he was invited to preach at a huge church convention held on the west coast. As he waited to speak, an old pastor sitting near him saw his nervousness, and walked over to him and said, "God hasn't dropped you yet." Tom took much heart in this comment, went and gave his talk. After he was finished he walked by the old pastor who whispered to him, "See."

Tom wrote that nothing made him more upset than the excuses people gave for missing church. He said worship should be central for people every week. Rather it is often relegated to the attitude "if the sea is smooth, I will be there." Worship should be as natural as breathing. Let first things be first. We should plan all of our week around worship.

He wrote that the church has often lost its focus, it seems to spend so much of its time on issues and problems of the world, it tries to be a problem solver. So we have countless meetings and conferences. By the time the church finds a solution to the problem, the problem has changed. Rather we should focus on the work of evangelism. Conferences and meetings get in the way, of helping and caring.

Pastor Tom talked about the times he became discouraged and tired as a pastor. He sometimes thought that maybe he should leave. But then the phone would ring and people would need him. He commented that love and care are the only relief from failure.

Tom loved to see children and families in church. When someone would complain to him about the noisy children, Tom would quote a study he had read which said that people listen in 90 second bursts. So he said that if a person misses one or two of these bursts because of a noisy child, that won't hurt anyone. Let the little children come.

Pastor Beaty mentioned that Tom worked with a beloved colleague while pastor at Edison Park in Chicago, his name was Harold Nesheim. When Harold Nesheim died much too young, Tom said at his funeral, "Dirty deal, Harold, dirty deal." So Pastor Beaty repeated these words, "Dirty deal, Tom, dirty deal." So much more to live for.

Pastor Tom always expected God to do great things, to bring about another surprise. He said that a person does not have to have a theological education to be saved, but at the same time he said we cannot grow without some theological understanding. And the two basic themes that he lived by were grace and the priesthood of all believers.

By grace you have been saved. And because we have been captured by God's grace in Jesus Christ, we are called to minister. Everyone is a minister. Tom said that God did not create any losers, you have the potential to be great. There are no points given for saying that we are worthless. God is loving us into greatness. You are called to do ministry, you are in just the right place if it serves Jesus.

The world and the church have been richly blessed by the life of Pastor Tom Housholder. As the bulletin cover declared, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" Lutheran Church of Hope has much to be thankful for this outstanding pastor as well, for his life and ministry and values and passion lives on in the life of Pastor Mike.