

Edward J. Thum Memorial Service

Dove of Peace Lutheran Church

Pastor Stephen Springer

April 2, 2011

Dear Friends:

More cruise ships depart from the Port of Miami for vacation destinations than from any other port in the world. And more of Christ's saints depart from Dove of Peace Lutheran Church for their heavenly destination than from any other church in the world. Well, we may not be the biggest, but we are among the best. And so, as one of the preferred ports of the Christian Church, we bear a strong witness to the communion of saints. And no more so than today, when a member of our church who is old enough to be wise and respected, yet young enough to have died prematurely— Ed Thum, age 62— this congregation gathers in strength and numbers today, with friends from east and west, to again claim and bear witness to the promises of God. As Jesus said, *Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted.* (Matthew 10:29-30) You see, his eye is on the sparrow, we, the Church, testify today.

The Church has men and women, and I'm acutely aware these days that when a man dies, males hurt and grieve in some ways, and females hurt and grieve, often, in other ways. Males almost inevitably reflect on character. On this occasion, it's easiest for me to identify with Ed's sons Ed, Michael, and Gabe, who grieve the loss of a role model. Someone who shaped their character by his own example. With Ed, Michael, and Gabe, I treasure honesty and integrity and loyalty— traits that Ed has consistently demonstrated in a world of charlatans and easy money and cowardice. Kind of blunt of me to say, but Ed would say it that bluntly. On the male side of things, nothing stands out for me today more than Job's words, at the very beginning of the book of Job, when everything is stripped away from Job, Job says: *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord."* (Job 1:21) Easy come, easy go. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. As for me and my house, we still serve the Lord. That particular virtue that males admire is called *equanimity*. It's easier to understand if I state it the opposite way. The opposite of *equanimity* is being a drama queen. Ed faced not only his health crisis, but many things that challenge adults— parenthood, war, dishonest dealings, betrayal, success, bliss— things that overwhelm most of us, Ed faced with *equanimity*. And we grieve that loss in our lives, deeply, especially those of us who are handicapped with testosterone. Because it is rare. And because people with *equanimity* guide us and ground us. And we've lost a great and rare friend.

Females grieve a little differently, in many instances. Judi is my closest friend in the Thum family, and is my colleague in the ministry of the Church. And so I know Ed best through Judi, and through her eyes. On the female side, Judi is saying goodbye to the companion and partner that has constantly been with her. They have that long-term marriage syndrome, where neither one of them can remember the whole story without the other one filling in— *"Remember when we*

went to— where was it? Reno?— and we went with— was it with the Thompsons?” What jumps into my mind is the hysterically funny living room inhabited by Judi and Ed with their two laptops and all of Ed’s electronic devices. It was a blend of a man-cave and a dove’s nest. So I think about my friend Judi and the living room furniture, and the empty lounge chair. Does the chair now stay as a memorial, like Archie Bunker’s famous chair, now in the Smithsonian Institute? Does the living room get rearranged now, or will that be disrespectful? If the chair sits there, will Judi feel forlorn?

So we grieve differently, because we have lost differently. But Christ consoles each of us in different ways. To one of us he gives a cherished memory. To another of us he gives the sacrament of communion. To someone else, he gives a word of scripture. To you, maybe a dream. To her, Christ gives a good friend. It’s not what we want. We want our father, our Peepaw, our husband, our brother-in-law, our lifelong friend. But as Jesus says, *“You can’t always get what you want. But if you try sometimes, you might just find, you get what you need.”* (Either Jesus said that, or Mick Jagger, I always get them mixed up.)

Ed had an illness called multiple myeloma. A form of blood and marrow cancer that is very difficult to treat, and Ed lived significantly longer than his textbook prognosis. Ed had a lot of days in which he experienced crippling pain. And he had even more days when he was just too pooped to get up. Aside from those things, the disease was mercifully uneventful, and the struggle was not intolerable, and the end came peacefully, and without weeks and months wasted by languishing in hospital beds. The sons tell me they are awed by their father’s wisdom, to the point that he almost has a mystique, and I’ll tell you about that in a minute. The psalmist says, *The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.* (Psalm 90:10) That’s pretty grim, isn’t it? Get to the facts, even bluntly, if necessary, like Ed. *The days of our life are seventy years, or perhaps eighty, if we are strong; even then their span is only toil and trouble; they are soon gone, and we fly away.* (So we’ll sing “I’ll Fly Away” at the end of this worship.) And then the psalmist continues: *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Psalm 90, verse 12, a good take-home verse for everyone, but especially you, Ed, and Michael, and Gabriel. *So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* Judi, you and Ed took those trips, and spent that time together. Because you had wise hearts, and in the face of this diagnosis, which would have crushed some people with despair, and sent others scrambling for faraway cures, God taught you two to “number your days.” *Carpe diem*— which is not in the Bible, but then, neither is Mick Jagger. *Carpe diem*, “seize the day.” Feel wise, Judi, and blessed, that you squeezed every last drop out of the oranges. You cooked the ham, and then used the ham bone to make beans. And then gave the bone to the dog. *Teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

So we gather, the Church, in numbers, here at the Port of Dove of Peace. In Spanish, the word for “port” is *puerto*. But in the infinitely more spiritual Spanish language, *puerto* is also the word for door. So Dove of Peace is the port, the doorway, between this life and the other life. Not just Dove of Peace, but the whole body of Christ. We’re all connected in him— rich and poor, Italian

and Swedish, married and divorced, male and female, pretty and ugly, the lucky and the unlucky—we're all connected in Christ, even the living and the dead. For that reason, Dove of Peace does not have a fellowship hall, or a parish hall, or a lunchroom. We have an All Saints' Hall. Because whenever the saints in this life come together for food and drink, the Lord is present, and in the Lord we are forever united with those who are on the other side of the portal, the *puerto*, the door. Edward is gone, and we are right to grieve and to shed tears. And to not deny the magnitude of our loss. But as the Church, we know that we remain connected to him, around the altar rail, in the one Jesus who is resurrection and life.

That's the Church's message, that's why we're here today. This is our story, this is our witness. And this has always been Ed's witness. This is Ed's story, this is Ed's song. And now he's singing those praises all the day long. Amen.