

**SERVICE of REMEMBRANCE AND THANKSGIVING**  
**Gustavus Adolphus College - Class of 1960**  
*Sermon: The Rev. Paul A. Tidemann*

May God's grace and peace be with us all.

In the early 1950's at Gustavus, Dr. Edgar Carlson, our college president, gave a chapel sermon entitled "Education for Life." He began it by saying:

The day that you left for your Easter vacation a letter was brought to my office which etched itself in my memory in a manner that has seldom happened to me. In a way I suppose you could say that it was a routine sort of letter. It was addressed to the Public Relations Office and had to do with the mailing list. But I think it might well be called great literature if the measure of great literature is the ability to make words carry a great weight of meaning. The letter was four lines long; there were no periods in it, and some capitals where they had no business being. This is what the letter said: "Please stop sending these to Julian, he was drafted into the army, was a prisoner of war in Korea for 864 days, while there he contracted a serious heart condition, and died this morning in Veteran's Hospital."

Julian was a graduate of Gustavus. I do not know his last name. I do not know if any family members of the 37 of our classmates who have died in the past 50 years have written a similar letter to the college. As I look over the list of these 37 friends who have died, 17% of our class, I see faces and talented people—singers, pastors, business people, teachers, and homemakers, to name a few. I confess that an image does not come to my mind about every one of them—maybe about half of them. But, when I look them up in the yearbook, I know that face.

Dr. Carlson raised an important question in his sermon way back when. He said, "What impresses me when I think about Julian and his education is that none of the things that we could have given him to prepare him for the life he faced would have been wasted if the story of Julian had ended differently." Dr. Carlson spoke of the preparation that he believed Gustavus gives a person for all times and circumstances of life, including death.

There are some of us gathered here who knew one or more of these 37 classmates very well. Some of us may feel particularly sad about a certain person's death, even though many years may have passed. As one who has experienced the death of everyone in my immediate family, including a brother who graduated from Gustavus, I find comfort in the passage from Isaiah which says, "Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who are of a fearful heart, 'Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God.' and then goes on to say, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy."

I think of these people and the fact that some of our classmates died in difficult if not tragic circumstances as well as others whose death may have been of more peaceful and natural causes. But whatever the circumstance, in my own mind and spirit I think about these good friends today and they have wide open eyes, they hear life fully, they dance and leap for joy, and speak words of peace.

We have a statement in our Apostles' Creed that says that we believe in the communion of saints. I have always felt that this phrase suggests to me that the friends who have died are present to us if we wish them to be, not in any mystical way, but in our active memory. My brother, John, a Gustie grad in 1964, died at age 44, but he and I have little simulated conversations in my mind from time to time.

He is not lost to me. When this goes on, it's a bit like being on that highway that Isaiah speaks of which he calls the Holy Way—a way set apart for a moment, where the redeemed walk. No one is excluded from that highway—at least I have no right to assume that God would exclude anyone.

I am informed by the words of Jesus in the lesson we read from John 6: "Everything that God gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of the one who sent me. And this is the will of the one who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that God has given me, but raise it up on

the last day.”

So as we gather this weekend to celebrate the 50 years that have passed since we graduated from Gustavus, let us keep in mind and heart these 37 persons who cannot be physically with us. I would even invite us, in our conversations, to share good memories of something that Lin, or Gary, or Jim, or Dennis, or Greta, or Neil, or Judy or someone else did or said while we were together.

Let us give thanks that our friends are part of the communion of saints, as are each of us, and that God has promised us life that is without end, for, as Christ Jesus said, “This is indeed the will of God my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up.”

AMEN.