

George A. Hamrick July 8, 1932-August 15, 2011

Rev. Dick Piscatelli, pastor Williamsville UMC

I believe it was the famous Coach Lombardi of the Green Bay Packers who once said, “Winning isn’t everything; it’s the only thing.” I think Paul was saying the same thing when he said these words found just before the words from Philippians you already have heard. Paul says, *“I want to know Christ and the power that raised him from the dead. I want to share in his sufferings and become like him in his death. Then I have hope that I myself will be raised from the dead.”*

Those are wonderful words for us this morning as we celebrate the new life that George A. Hamrick is enjoying right now. *“That I myself will be raised from the dead.”* What a great thought, what a great promise to cling to. That’s the faith that George Hamrick had in his Lord and Savior, and that is the faith that he modeled for his family, and that’s the faith he showed as he suffered these past few weeks before finding his peaceful rest waiting for his own resurrection to eternal life with Jesus.

During the visitation last night a song was played in the background that some of you might have caught, or maybe you didn’t because so many people came and so many had things to say to you his family. When the family told me they were playing this song I thought how fitting. You see, the song is “I Can Only Imagine” which deals with wondering what heaven is all about, wondering what’s going on up there, imagining great things happening, reunions, daily classes for newcomers, classes for older veterans, trumpet sounds when new arrivals enter the gates of heaven. I can only imagine sitting with Jesus, the apostles, the legends of our faith. I can only imagine seeing famous hymn writers and other famous people. With joy and a smile in my heart, I can only imagine what heaven is going to be like and how we are going to enjoy each day in heaven. I can only imagine.

Today we know this for a fact. George doesn't have to imagine anymore. He knows firsthand what heaven is like. He has been greeted by family and friends. The first to greet him was Jesus who presented him to God who gave him his crown and told him those words we all want to hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Much was given to you, much you have accomplished. Now it's time to rest, to enjoy your great rewards. Come join your family, see your mom, dad, your little sister, your little brother, and the many friends from Williamsville. And that lady over there, you know her, that's your wife Gaye, she hasn't changed, she's jumping up and down with excitement with her arms open wide glad you finally made it home. You better hightail it over to her before she bursts, before she flaps those angel's wings and flies away. She's been waiting for 5 years for you to join her. She already has your mansion prettied up for both of you just the way she.... I mean you both like. She's been working on it since she got word that you would be joining her."

I can only imagine. I can only imagine the joy George feels these days seeing old friends, walking around heaven on streets of gold without a limp. Doesn't need a cane anymore, his body have been made new. He has reached the pinnacle of his life. And as his kids told me, he has been preparing for this time since he came into this life born to Bert and Laura Woods Hamrick on July 8, 1932.

It wasn't always a smooth journey, losing two siblings, his brother Howard and sister Marian. But perhaps that is where his faith began to grow, a faith that told him one day there would be a family reunion in heaven, a faith that said those who believe in God, who believe in Jesus as Savior will be joined together once again for all eternity. And God brought a wonderful woman into his life and Gaye Beauchamp became Mrs. George Hamrick and they proceeded on the journey together and added 3 sweet kids, Keith, Kathy and Kraig.

When I asked the kids to give me one word about their dad Kathy's word was **'determined.'** He was determined not to let his birth defect hinder him. He was determined to be the best at what he did no matter what. He was determined to show others that a handicap is not a handicap only an opportunity sometimes to do things differently. Kathy remembers her dad being a member of the Williamsville Volunteer Fire Department and one day there was a fire only a few blocks from their house. Her dad got all his stuff on, carried his coat, his helmet and instead of driving to the fire, he ran as fast as he could, bad leg and all, to help someone else. He was determined to help put out that fire and do what needed to be done. And speaking of the fire department, what great joy it was and a great tribute to George, Keith and Kraig, who all served on the Williamsville fire department to see many of those who served alongside them coming to say farewell to a comrade in arms.

Keith said his dad was **'loving and proud.'** He sure must have been loving because they said that over and over again. Their dad loved his wife, his kids, their spouses, Judy, Randy, and his grandkids Jen-Luc and Cassie, plus his new step-grandkids Nathan, Zach, Rachel and Jorie. He not only loved them, but he was proud of them as well. They all had a special place in his heart.

Kraig had to pause for a minute or two to think about a word or phrase that would best represent his dad in his eyes. After a minute or two he said the one word that perhaps summed up his relationship with his dad was that dad was **'a friend.'** Many of you here today could repeat that I'm sure. He was a friend to all. A friend is someone you can count on. A friend is someone who accepts you for who you are. A friend is one that when you are in trouble he can be counted on to be there for you. A friend is one who shares with you his or her life. George was a friend. I too, counted him as my friend.

I've known George these past 5 years since I became his pastor. The one word that I would say about George is he was **'faithful.'** You see, since I've been the pastor here George hasn't missed many Sundays. He often would come through the alley and the back door. Then he started to come to the front door and with his bad leg and all the other stuff he had, would climb the stairs and come in and sit in the same pew each week. No matter what the weather seemed to be, he was here. His faithfulness to this church shows me his faithfulness to his Savior who told us all that life wouldn't be easy all the time, but to trust in God, to trust in Jesus. I saw that in a man of few words, a man who took it one day at a time, a man who encouraged others to keep on keeping on.

I'm told that where George lives now used to be our old parsonage. They tore the old one down that the kids lived in and built this new one. Maybe the influence of all those pastors who lived in that house crept into the lives of George and Gaye and all their kids by osmosis as they slept, ate, prayed and enjoyed family time, for from what I can see, they really are great kids. I'm sure they have their flaws, but the influence their mom and dad had certainly has helped them grow to be people who love God first, love Jesus, and who try to the best of their ability to live the life that their dad taught them and modeled for them and a life that God has set before them, a life like their dad's, preparing not for all the things in this life, but the things that lie ahead.

The Apostle John reminds us of this. When Jesus was having his last meal with them he said some profound things. He told them he was about to die. He told them not to worry for if they believed in God, believed also in him they had no worries. He made a promise when he said, 'in just a little while I will be leaving you, but have no fear, for one day I will return to take you to your home in heaven that I shall prepare for you. Then we will live together in eternity with all the rest of those who believe in me. It will be a place where there is no more pain, nor sorrow, nor sadness, nor illness, nor cancer, no more

hospitals, no more accidents. It is a place where the golf courses are green, the ponds filled with catchable throw back fish, and where hunting is allowed but the animals aren't injured.' (I can only imagine!) And I believe these could have been words that George could have said, and perhaps did say to his family in preparing them for this day.

So this morning we celebrate that new life George is enjoying. The family hoped beyond hope that when he went to the hospital this past Sunday it would be just a short stay to fix a couple of problems and that he would come back home soon. Well he is home, but not his home just a few houses down the block from this church. He is home with his wonderful wife Gaye and all the rest, even some of our own church members who have passed recently, and some of the others from this community that were his friends.

I shall miss him coming into church each Sunday sitting just behind my wife Carole where he sat each week. I'll miss his handshake and his answer that he was doing okay when I would ask how he was doing this week. He didn't want to be fussed over, even on his birthday when we asked him to stand so we could sing to him and Lee Miller took his picture for our website. Even taking communion he refused to stay in his seat but came like all the others to receive the grace and mercy of God through the communion elements around the table of grace. We will miss him at the senior luncheons where he came to be with his community friends to have small talk and enjoy the fellowship and latest news.

The family will always remember camping trips, being taught how to hunt, how to fish. They will remember their dad for being an innovator, who sometimes would take his time to work things out, trying to come up with the best solution. They will remember their dad as strong, yet gentle. They remember a man who when he got home how they had misbehaved and dad would handle it. But they could not remember any spankings, such as the day Kraig, then around 5, climbed the TV antenna to the top and dad trying to talk him down. He didn't yell for fear of making him afraid and something would happen.

He just yelled up and asked if he was ready to come down. He stayed few more minutes and came down. Dad didn't spank him. Just let it go.

They all remember a time when they were camping at New Salem on a Father's Day weekend and dad had to walk a ways to use the restroom. He seemed gone a long time and they began to wonder if he took the newspaper with him. Just about that time dad came around the corner kind of red in the face. They asked what happened and he said, "Well, somehow I got locked in there. I kept pounding and no one heard me. Finally someone else must have had to use the john and when they opened it I was free as a bird."

Though mom ruled the roost, dad was full of gentleness, yet firm. He gave Gaye all the things she desired in this life and watched over her for all those 45 years of marriage, even in those days leading up to her day of glory. He was an example to his family, to his community, to his church. He was an example of a strong faith, a determination and full of courage.

They remember dad working lots of overtime to provide for them. They remember his generosity showing them by his example that they should always give back because of what they received. Perhaps that's why they all served on the Williamsville fire department. He taught them to be kind, welcome all people and treat everyone fair, after all we are all God's people created in the image of God.

While I was there they were checking out the website messages and shared with me one of them that I asked if I could share with you. Carol Harris entitled her thoughts on his passing "ANOTHER ANGEL."

"I can remember sitting on my front porch as a kid and watching a young man bring his beautiful bride to their new home. I could tell they were very much in love because he would put his arm around her and smile a smile that only a man can give to his bride that

he loves so much. As time went on the love was still there. She would greet him each evening and take his lunch bucket. I was so excited when Mom told me the pretty lady was going to have a baby. I talked to her frequently as she passed by our house to walk uptown. Oh yes, she really did love the man who was her husband. They had a fine son, cute as can be. As time went on they were blessed with a beautiful daughter and then a son as sweet as the first. The man I speak of was called home early this morning and I am sure his pretty bride was waiting at heaven's gate to see his sweet smile. George Hamrick you will be missed. Love to his family that loved him so much."

Such are the memories they all shared with me with joy in their hearts. When asked for a funny story about dad Keith remembers the time as a teenager during a snowstorm he and some friends were trying to have some fun in the snow. The snow had turned hard and when he was gunning his truck as a teenager might be prone to do, he skidded and caught the grill on the truck and it needed mending. After he and his friends tried to patch it up he went home to tell dad the news. It seems dad had just had some minor surgery and well the medicine had not worn off. Keith remembers a scolding of sorts, a grounding....but dad did it with love. He also remembers the time dad and he were trying to change a fan belt. It was a little difficult so dad told Keith to get in the car and when he told him, crank the engine just a bit. Keith got in the car, of course the hood is up, can't see dad and all that. Dad is hunched over working on the belt, Keith yells out, "Ready yet?" Dad yells back, "No!" However, Keith didn't hear 'no' he heard 'GO!' and cranked the engine and dad lost a piece of his finger. Kathy shared that sometime, I'm not sure the situation, that dad lost part of his index finger during an accident. They were able to attach it, which was great. With that bandage on when he wanted to make a point with the kids he would use that particular hand and, well, let's say you had to be there to get the full effect of the situation.

One last story from Kraig. He remembers going to their grandparents for Easter every year. One year his mom made chocolate pies and on the way out of the house getting into the car dad dropped the pies. No chocolate pies at grandmas. The next year the chocolate pies were baked and Kraig offered to carry them to the car, but dad refused, Kraig almost insisted reminding dad what happened the previous year, but dad just said go on and get in the car. Kraig, kind of pushed it a little I guess, so dad tried to kick him in the you-know-where, and when he did, yup, you guessed it, dad slipped and dropped the pies again. Kraig said, “See dad, you should have let me carry them. Once again we have no chocolate pies for Easter.”

That is only a slight picture of the earthly life of George A. Hamrick, a man of God, devoted father, husband, friend, grandfather, and community man. His troubles are over on this earth. He rests from his labors. He has fought the good fight, received his crown, has seen Jesus and all his family, and perhaps even had a dance with his wife Gaye.

I can only imagine what they are doing today up there. Maybe they are looking down upon us today and maybe your dad is asking your mom about these memories you have saying, “did I really do that? Did I really spoil them rotten? Was I really a good dad?” And perhaps your mom replies, “Yes you did all that and much, much more they weren’t allowed to share.”

I can only imagine their conversations. I can only imagine what heaven is like myself. I know one thing about heaven, it will be a great place to spend eternity because there will be no more dying there, no more separations, no more fears to conquer.

I can only imagine! Perhaps you have your own imaginations. The one thing we need to do is be prepared for it as was George. He was prepared everyday for this, his moment of glory. So this morning we don’t mourn like those who have no hope. We rejoice as

those who will be reunited. We look forward to that day some time, though maybe not too soon.

This morning it is time to close the book on the earthly life of George A. Hamrick. His life on this earth might be over but the memories and the legacies he left behind are priceless and will never be forgotten. Now he celebrates new life and new adventures that we can only imagine.

Our book of life on this earth is still open. May we walk this life as determined and prepared as George was, with the love of God in our hearts. We don't say good-bye, we say, "George, dad, keep the lights on. We'll miss you. But we will see you one day. Till we meet again take care of yourself and all your family and friends."

Now till that time of our own reunion with God may the God who gave us life, continue to watch over us until our call comes. In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen!