

Robert Ash Williamson Oct 21, 1913-Apr 10, 2011

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There is a time for everything under the sun the Scripture records. A time to be born, a time to laugh, a time to plant, a time to harvest, a time to enjoy life, a time to cry, a time to die, a time to mourn, a time to celebrate.

This morning we come together as a community celebrating the new life that has begun for Robert Ash Williamson. He was born on Oct 21, 1913, and went home on Sunday morning, April 10, 2011. Robert, or Bob as many knew him, spent 97 years on this earth. At his passing he was the second oldest of the Williamsville United Methodist Church behind Florence Yokley who in just a few days will be 102. In between his entering this world the son of Elmer and Amy Ash Williamson he lived a full wonderful life being married for over 57 years to his wonderful bride Helen M. Cuff that produced 3 sons, Robert, Neil and Rex and of course those grandkids and great grandkids.

This morning we come not just to remember his life on this earth but to celebrate his new life that was prepared for him before he was even born. It's that new life that we celebrate at this time of year. For we know that the grave isn't the end for those who believe in Jesus, but just the resting place of our bodies until the final resurrection. Death is not to be feared for Jesus defeated death and has risen to restore our life in a place where those who believe will find no more sorrow, no more sadness, no more tears, no more death. His promise to his disciples on Maundy Thursday was that he was going to prepare a place for each of them so that when the time was right he would return and take them to that place where they would live forever with him. That promise was not just for them, but for the whole world, for those who walk with faith in Jesus.

So this morning we come not so much with sadness, though there is always sadness when one so loved has died, but with great joy for Bob's work on this earth is finished, he has crossed the finish line and now rests from his labors. He has heard those encouraging words, "Well done my good and faithful servant. Much was given you, much you accomplished. Now you may receive your crown and rest with all the others." Bob now joins those who have gone on before him and who have greeted him at heaven's gate, which includes his wife Helen, his sister Virginia, and brother Carroll, as well as other friends and family.

Yes, there is a time to live and a time to die. Right now for a few moments let me share with you some words about this man from some of the things Robert and Neil remembered about their dad, about the man who lived on this earth, the man who had a great heart and loved life, the man well liked in those communities he lived and worked, and who had many friends and left his family with a great legacy.

Neil and Robert remember their dad as being strong in character who taught them many things and how to get a long in life. An avid gun and knife collector who enjoyed camping, taking walks with his dogs no matter the weather, hunter and traveler to Colorado and Alaska. He taught them good work ethics, always work hard and be honest was his motto. He was in some ways a perfectionist. He was proud of how his family turned out and though he was the head of their home, he gave most of that credit to their mom because in reality she ruled the roost. He may have been the disciplinarian, but she was the healing ointment. He did some farming and had his own business in downtown Springfield where he did graphic art photography.

Since Rex already shared some words about his dad some of what I say might be the same for they are thoughts that Robert and Neil had of their dad when I met with them. Neil told me that during WW II his dad served in the Navy and that is where his passion

for photography came from. He was stationed in Panama and they said he would be in airplanes taking pictures of work being done there. They remembered two things about that...one, others held on to him as they held him beyond the plane to take pictures...and second, while their dad was there, no attacks happened.

They also said how one day he rode his motorcycle out west but had to hitchhike home because his bike broke down. They said he hitchhiked on a train....well not hitchhiked like we think of today, but let's just say he kind of found himself jumping into a boxcar as it slowed down near where he was... but he got caught. Instead of tossing him off, a nice kind man decided his punishment was to stroke the old steam engine.

The boys remember camping trips out west which gave them all an appreciation for nature. No sleeping in hotels or motels or RV's. It was living in tents, sleeping on the ground, no campgrounds with running water. It was a great time for all and they did find a great appreciation for nature that dad and mom brought to them. However, for Neil, though he fondly remembers those days and has a great appreciation for the nature his dad loved his trips today do not include tent camping but a fine motel. No campfire, but a fine restaurant. When Bob retired he and Helen took their pick-up and drove to Alaska where they once again enjoyed the beauty of God's creation.

He was stickler for detail and was a perfectionist. When he was doing something and there was a flaw in it, he would throw that piece away and do it again. And if that was not done right, he would do it again and keep doing it until it came out right. He taught his boys that if a job was worth doing, it was worth doing well. But the boys will be quick to say, not all of their dad's perfectionism rubbed off on them. But his work ethics, well that's another story. One thing that they said about their dad was that he had a gentle soul. Strict, but gentle at the same time. Neil remembers the time he was 16 and just got his license. He took the pickup truck and was out for a spin and it must have rained for he slid

from the water on the road and flipped the truck end over end and it landed in the field right side up. In those days there were no seatbelts so Neil was lucky. Neil was so shaken he ran all the way home. Perhaps he thought he was in for it for wrecking the family pickup truck. When mom looked at him she asked if he was okay, any bruises, did he hurt anywhere? It was a miracle that he didn't have any that couldn't be patched with a few Band-Aids. His dad just looked at him and instead of scolding him said, "There goes a quick \$1,000 dollars."

I didn't get to know Mr. Williamson very much because when I became pastor here he had already lost his wife and moved in with Neil and Patti. But every once in awhile they would show up here for a Sunday worship service and the members of the congregation that knew him greeted him warmly. It was a touch of home for him. A place where he might have felt closer to God and to his wife Helen who worked often to support her church and its missions. I enjoyed his sweet smile that beamed from ear to ear and listening to him say some nice words about this church and some of the people. He may not have heard everything I said in a sermon, nor understood my Boston accent, but he enjoyed being home once again where he could rest and find an old face that he remembered and old friends that were his neighbors.

So it is fitting this morning that he has come home again for one last visit. We thank our God for the life of Robert Ash Williamson. I know his middle name came from his mother's maiden name, but when I read his middle name I thought of an ash tree that was big, strong with solid roots. They make bats from an ash tree because of its strength. Maybe that is one way to remember the life of a man who touched so many. A man who was quiet, reserved, conservative, a man who was a stickler for detail, yet with a gentle soul and a good heart whose roots went deep.

One more thought. Mr. Williamson loved to have sharp knives around. It made things easier to cut things. Being on the farm I'm sure there were times they were needed to cut items that they raised. They say that when they were living in Williamsville you could find Bob sitting at the kitchen table with a bunch of knives and a sharpening stone just going back and forth while holding a conversation. The boys said they knew the day when dad sharpened the knives because they would find mom walking around with Band-Aids upon many a finger from the cuts from those well sharpened knives in the drawer.

Yes, there is a time for everything under the sun. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to mourn and a time to get on with life. Today we have taken time to remember a few things from the life on this earth of a husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend. Perhaps some of you have your own stories about such a man that like his family will remain for years to come.

But now there is a time to say goodbye as he rests from his labors. He will be missed by many but one day we will meet again. So this not a final farewell but a brief parting till we meet again and have a grand reunion in a place where time will never end, nor will the sunshine, nor the joys.

So as we leave this place to bring him to his final resting place where he will rest beside his beloved wife Helen, may the God who has given us His Son bring comfort, peace, and hope into our lives in the days ahead. May we remember Christ has opened the doors for eternal life through his death and his rising and that those who follow his ways will find that place that Jesus has gone to prepare for all of us.

Till then, Robert, thanks for the memories...enjoy your new surroundings...be at peace, amen!