

"The Dwelling Place of the Man of God" Psalm 90:1

The Divine Service of the Word in Memory of

Friedrich Ackermann

20 February Anno Domini 1999

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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Emmett, Idaho

Dear Bertha, O****, P****, the other family members, friends and neighbors of Fred, and fellow members of the Family of God here at Our Redeemer,

The old man had seen much and endured many difficulties in his life. There were times of great joy and magnificent wonder, and there were days of bitter sorrow and times of awful anguish. This man of God had first-hand knowledge of the oppression and bondage that one human being ... that an oppressive tyrant could have over an entire people and the atrocities that are able to be inflicted over many people simply by an insane order being issued by a mad-man and then ruthlessly carried out by his murdering henchmen.

This man of God also, on numerous occasions, escaped such a death at the hands of those who would have murdered him. What a relief it must have been for him to have crossed the sea and to have left behind, on the other side of that great body of water, the land of oppression and bondage! He knew, not only with his head as one does who might read a history book, but with his heart and life what deliverance was and what deliverance is.

But as you who are here today know, knowing not just from reading a history book or a newspaper obituary, but knowing with your grieving hearts and souls, there was and there is, on both sides of the sea, death. As long as a human being walks to and fro on the face of this earth, death awaits and dear people, the evidence is all around us. Even after the old man had escaped and was making his exodus on the way to a new land, he journeyed through the valleys of the shadow of death and through the wilderness deserts where the way was strewn with the grave sites of his people.

But no matter where he was and no matter where he lived, whether in the old country of oppression and bondage, or in the new land of release and freedom, the Lord God was with him. If scared and not knowing whether the next instant he would be captured and executed, or, if rejoicing along the way of escape, the Lord God was with him. Therefore, as the end of his life on this earth drew near, the Holy Spirit caused this old man named Moses to write a psalm. You heard it this morning as the Old Testament Reading and, as far as we know, Psalm 90 is the only psalm that we have in the Bible that was written by Moses.

Psalm 90 does not pull any punches. Sin ... Moses' sin as well as yours, mine and Fred's ... sin is the cause of God's wrath. If we are permitted to grow old, we still waste away and die, not because it is

natural, but because of God's reaction to sin ... to original sin, to our sins of weakness, sins of ignorance, willful sins, ... sins of thought, ones of words, and ones of deeds. As the Apostle Paul wrote, Therefore *as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned (Romans 5:12)*. But as you read Psalm 90 you realize that the Lord's wrath is only exceeded by the Lord's love. Thus, for the person whose God is the Lord, there is a great deal of comfort knowing that God satisfies the soul with His steadfast love for as many days and years as we have on this earth and in this life. The Lord God - Father, Son, Holy Spirit - lives in the believer and the believer lives in the Lord.

Thus, the sermon text for Fred Ackermann's memorial service is based upon the first verse of Psalm 90. Please listen to that one verse under the sermon theme ...

... The Dwelling Place of the Man of God

A Prayer of Moses, the man of God: LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

That is our text.

The question before each one of us today is this: Am I, are you, able to say and to pray, "Lord, You are my dwelling place"? Certainly Fred, as a man of God, would be able to join Moses in praying, *Lord, Thou hast been* my dwelling place in all generations. So, think about the generations during which Fred lived and consider the truth that the Lord was Fred's dwelling place throughout Fred's years. He was born in the Ukraine before the First World War and on January 26, 1908, the Lord God became Fred's dwelling place, for it was on that date, at the age of one month that the infant son of Johanness and Kristina was baptized.

You see, according to the Holy Scriptures, Baptism is not the work of man but rather, is the gracious gift of God and, as the Bible declares, *for as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Galatians 3:27)*. At that time all the blessings and benefits of Jesus' sin-atoning death on the cross became Fred's for the Lord *saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the Washing of Regeneration and Renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by His grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life (Titus 3)*.

Thus, a generation lived and a generation died with the Great War and, two years before the death of Vladimir Lenin, on May 18, 1922 Fred confirmed the Christian faith during a time and in a place where doing so could have easily cost him his life. No matter, he declared his belief and trust in the Lord God ... in the Father Who created him, in the Son Who redeemed him, in the Holy Spirit Who worked faith in his heart. The Apostles' Creed, which we confessed earlier this morning, is a declaration of the truth that Fred confirmed and said that he would rather suffer all things, even death, than fall away from the Lord.

Those words are a part of the confirmation vows included in the rite of confirmation in the Lutheran Church. Fred confirmed that declaration that had been made on his behalf at his Baptism. Why? Why in the world would Fred be willing to go to the point of enduring death rather than denying the Lord? Well, you see, he believed that Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world and rose again from the dead. So while *the dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit returns to God Who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7)* -- while we committed the mortal remains to the ground yesterday, truly I say to

you, today Fred is with the Lord Jesus in Paradise. Please know this. Fred believed and trusted in the Resurrection of the dead. Therefore, even the grave is not able to hold the mortals remains of those who belong to Jesus and thus, body and soul will be reunited on the Last Day. Or as Jesus has promised to those who are His disciples, *Because I live, you will live also. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in Me, and I in you (John 14:19-20).*

With great joy and hope and confidence and comfort, you and I are able to join Moses and Fred saying, *LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*

Thus a generation lived and so a generation died, and on June 16, 1935, during the crushing reign of Joseph Stalin, Fred and Bertha were married and they promised to each other, in the presence of the Lord God and those in attendance at their wedding that, whether it be for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health, they would be husband and wife. You see, both believed and trusted the words of Jesus Who promised *Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20).*

Thus they would ever walk with Jesus, coming to this House of worship -- to this place that bears His Name, the Name of Our Redeemer. Together they received Christ when they came to the Lord's Supper for they believed the words of Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God, when He said, "Take and eat, this is My Body which is given for you. Take and drink, this is My Blood of the New Testament which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." With hearty thanks and joyful assurance, we are able to join Moses, Fred and Bertha in saying, *LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*

Truly Fred heard the Word of God and believed the Good News of Christ crucified and risen. He trusted in the promise of Jesus Who said, *In My Father's House are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.* Ah, yes indeed, to always have the Lord as one's own dwelling place! And thus it is for Fred. For on February 12th, the Lord God -- Who had been Fred's dwelling place in all generations ... from the Ukraine to Germany to the United States ... from Lenin to Stalin to Clinton ... from the Great War to World War II to the Cold War ... from his cradle in Hoffnungstahl to his bedroll in Schleswig to his deathbed in Boise -- it finally happened eight days ago -- the Lord God called Fred home. *LORD, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.*

Now, Bertha, be comforted by the Good News concerning those who have fallen asleep in Christ. The Apostle John saw the multitude in heaven and was asked a question by one of the elders: *"Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" I said to him, "Sir, you know." And he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night within His Temple; and He Who sits upon the throne will shelter them with His presence (Revelation 7:13-15).*

That, dear friends, is Fred's story and it's the kind of a story that ends with him living happily ever after. But Fred's story is his own, with its own starting point and with its own places along the way and its own ending point in this world. The story of Moses had its own starting point. His story began in Egypt and it had its own story line and places. It, too, ended with Moses living happily ever after. Not all stories end that way. King Saul's story ended in tragedy as did Judas'. Both had been

disciples of the Lord; both had followed the Way of God. But they got sidetracked and were lost because the Lord was no longer their dwelling place.

What about you? Each one of us has a unique starting point; a different path that has led you to this place on this day for this memorial service. You are either a part of the Lord and His Church or you are apart from Him and without His Church. For those of us who believe that Jesus is the Incarnate Son of God Who died on the cross for the sins of the world and Who rose again from the dead on that first Easter morning, then rest assured that the Lord is your dwelling place. For those who do not, then consider these words, not as a condemning threat, but as a earnest invitation, so that you may say, *surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the House of the LORD forever (Psalm 23:6).*

Dear friends, please listen to Psalm 90 once again under the theme ...

...The Dwelling Place of the Man of God

*A Prayer of Moses, the man of God. LORD,
Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.
Before the mountains were brought forth,
or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world,
from everlasting to everlasting Thou art God.
Thou turnest man back to the dust, and sayest,
"Turn back, O children of men!"
For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past,
or as a watch in the night.
Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream,
like grass which is renewed in the morning:
in the morning it flourishes and is renewed;
in the evening it fades and withers.
For we are consumed by Thy anger;
by Thy wrath we are overwhelmed.
Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee,
our secret sins in the Light of Thy countenance.
For all our days pass away under Thy wrath,
our years come to an end like a sigh.
The years of our life are threescore and ten,
or even by reason of strength fourscore;
yet their span is but toil and trouble;
they are soon gone, and we fly away.
Who considers the power of Thy anger,
and Thy wrath according to the fear of Thee?
So teach us to number our days
that we may get a heart of wisdom.
Return, O LORD! How long?
Have pity on thy servants!
Satisfy us in the morning with Thy steadfast love,
that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.
Make us glad as many days as Thou hast afflicted us,*

*and as many years as we have seen evil.
Let Thy work be manifest to Thy servants,
and Thy glorious power to their children.
Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us,
and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us,
yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it.
Amen.*