

Ephesians 2:8-10

July 16, 2012 – Funeral: Donald E. Ostrum

Pastor Mark A. Cordes

Amazing Grace!

In the name of Jesus, Lover of our souls and our amazing Savior, dearly redeemed family of God:

Sometimes it's a generational thing. What parents and grandparents consider "amazing," would more likely be called "awesome" by their children – except that now it seems so lame. For instance, my dad was big into technology. I still remember in the 1960's, going into the Payless store one Sunday afternoon. He showed us kids a black and white TV that had no tubes. "See how small it is!" he said. "It has something called 'transistors' that fit everything into this tiny case." But how does that compare with the high definition movies you can watch on your retinal display iPad? "Amazing" changes with time.

Likewise if you had talked with Don about one of his favorite subjects, the "good old days" in Green Bay would more likely come up with Vince Lombardi. But legends of the past seem like ancient history to everything going on now. Each generation redefines "amazing" and "awesome."

That's one reason why Don chose these words of God through Paul for us to think about at his funeral. There is something so **Amazing** and wonderful that every generation since the creation of the world has had reason to give praise and thanks. But it's not to ourselves. Don specifically asked for no eulogy. He had Someone better for us to praise. Don wanted everyone here to know the joyful peace he enjoyed throughout his life – to be strengthened in your hope and confidence if you know this already, and to find your greatest, eternal joy especially if this is the first time you've heard **Amazing Grace**.

Let's let Don's love for "Title Town – U.S.A." serve to illustrate something beyond human imagination or ability. Sometime in our visits I shared with Don how growing up on the Oregon Coast insulated me from Midwest rivalries. Not until attending an all-male college in Watertown, Wisconsin, did I realize the strong feelings. Every time the Packers and Vikings faced off, all the TV rooms were packed. All over campus you could hear the shouting. What I enjoyed most was the dining hall afterwards. I had more fun watching my classmates argue about who had the most obnoxious fans. As the saying goes, "It was like the pot calling the kettle black." Years later I heard Tommy Mischke on the radio in the Twin Cities describing a game he decided to watch in a bar across the river. Fortunately, he did not tell anyone who he was. He noticed Packer fans not only wanted to beat the Vikings, they wanted to "kill them." Mischke left very quietly before the game was over. My own son did not know where he stood until he found out that his maternal grandfather in Milwaukee owns part of Lambeau Field with season tickets back to the time of the war. Then and there Joel decided he was a Vikings fan.

I only mention all this to illustrate how awesome it is to trust God's **Amazing Grace**. If rooting for the right sports team determined where you spend eternity, the vast majority of us would lose the biggest game of all. Unlike sports down here, there is no second chance, no "next year," when this life is done. When the last trumpet sounds, if you're not ready, nothing in this world can compare with the eternal fires that God prepared for the devil and his fallen angels. Then we could do no more to help ourselves than a player could score a touchdown after dying of a heart attack on the field.

Here's what God said to the church people through Paul: *"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient."* We're born as sinners who will default to following the devil every time in rebellion against God like Adam in the beginning. But don't think it's just those hypocritical "church people." Paul continues: *"All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts."* All of us just want to do what feels good even though that always means sinning against God and our neighbor. *"Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath."* God clearly says His wrath

was coming down on us for our sins. The Bible actually says that God hates sinners, not just the sin, but the sinners themselves. (Hosea 9:15) That's the ***“perfect hatred”*** in Don's favorite Psalm 139:22.

That's the bad news, but now Paul rushes on with the great Good News about God's **Amazing Grace**: ***“But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.”*** We could not make ourselves spiritually alive, so God did it through Christ. ***“And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”*** (Ephesians 2:1–7 NIV84) God has planned an awesome championship celebration of His **Amazing Grace**. And He wants everyone to be ready by trusting not in what we do, but in what God has done. Listen to this!

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.”

“Grace” is truly **Amazing** because it is that warm love in God's heart for all of us on the opposite team. He created us to love and serve Him as His dear children, but we're too busy spending our time and our dime on ourselves, neglecting the poor and troubled all around us. God loves us selfish sinners with a totally unselfish love. God's one and only Son gladly gave up His life to wash away our guilt and sin with His holy, precious blood. Jesus did not deserve to die; we did. Jesus never sinned; we never stop sinning. We cannot boast in ourselves, not even in the faith to believe all this. Faith and the salvation it receives are all ***“a gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast.”*** But we can boast in one thing. God says, ***“Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD.”*** (2 Corinthians 10:17)

But don't think for a second that good works are not necessary. Yes, God saved us completely by the good works and perfect merits of Jesus Christ. Truly, ***“It is finished!”*** as He said. (John 19:30) Good works are necessary, but not for salvation. Good works serve as evidence of our faith in Jesus.

Another example from “Title Town – U.S.A.” will help. Maybe you've heard about that unique tradition in Green Bay. Packers live out in in the community and enjoy getting to know the kids too. In fact, for many years young boys have loaned their bicycles to move the big players down the hill to the practice field. Imagine some lineman straddling a boy's bike while coasting down the hill with the boy running beside. One player noticed quite a few poor boys in town who couldn't take part. So he bought bikes for them to loan to players on practice days.

As much as you might enjoy these stories, isn't it true that the boy's bike has nothing to do with whether or not the team won the championship last year? What's done is done. And in the case of the poor boys, they didn't even supply their own bikes. But their joy in loaning them is greater than all the rest. And the joy of the player who supplied the bikes even greater.

We cannot contribute even the nuts and bolts of bikes for God and heaven. God gives it all to us in Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior. He already won the championship. So if you're lined up on the opposite side of the line trying to face off with Jesus, you're already on the losing side. Consider this day as God's day of amnesty for you. The Holy Spirit – Referee has blown the whistle. He's calling through this word of **Amazing Grace** for you to step over on God's side of the line. Turn around and face the opposition with God's Champion, God's Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Tomorrow may be too late. But today is a great day of **Amazing Grace** to give your heart, your life, your all for God who loved and saved you first. All along your pathway through life, God has ***“prepared in advance”*** good works for you to do to His glory and praise. And you cannot do better to honor the memory of your husband, father, grandpa or friend, Don Ostrum, than to give your heart to God the way he did. Nothing would make Don happier. Nothing will bring you greater joy than to celebrate God's **Amazing Grace** in your heart and life right now. Today and always – we win with God in Christ alone. Amen.