

The Glory of New Life

✦ **Steady strength (vv.1-4)**

✦ **Joyful energy (vv.5-7)**

✦ **Highway to heaven (vv.8-10)**

In the name of our glorious God and Savior, Jesus Christ, dearly redeemed of the LORD:

Looking back twenty-five years, it almost seems comical: August 1987, as the Service Committee planned our first worship service for September 13, 1987, a man on that committee called for my resignation. He'd done this to three other pastors before me. I went across the hall to my office to pray. He was better when I returned. One of the brothers said they went around the table and told him what they thought of his suggestion. Over the years, there was also a well meaning man who consulted a lawyer about something he didn't like. And a woman who found me crying in my office one day, contacted our District President for a possible replacement. Three funerals that Fall and allergy medications made me weepy until I checked the print-out and stopped taking those pills. But back on the morning of September 13, 1987, 4:25 AM, I got a phone call from a disgruntled neighbor. His slurred speech said to stop our mail from piling up on his table. After I had his address, I laughed; I was getting up at 4:30 anyway. The trailer needed to be loaded for our first worship service in Snail Lake School.

Sometimes your worst enemies are your best blessings – if they drive you to your knees in humble dependence on God. Several of those individuals went on to distinguished service in other congregations. Maybe we were a blessing to them as they to us. Like “*streams in the desert*,” God got them blooming at a another time and place just as I prayed He would. God's love in Christ is **The Glory of New Life** for...

✦ **Steady strength (vv.1-4)**

Finally the snow melts in the mountains. Moisture rushes down dry river beds in the desert. Every wadi in the wilderness turns to a rushing torrent as the desert comes alive with spring flowers. “*The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the splendor of Carmel and Sharon; they will see the glory of the LORD, the splendor of our God.*” Let me share three stories of **Steady strength** from members a few of you may remember.

Evelyn Downey grew up in orphanages and group homes like Arner House in Shoreview. Staff called during our first three years of worship in Snail Lake School: “Evelyn would like to go to church. She just needs a ride.” Several members stepped up to help. One Sunday a few years later a teenage son came back from the parking lot and said, “Evelyn is asking when she can take Communion.” I said, “Thank-you, Lord!” After many visits to the group home and once through the *Simplified Catechism*, I was praying for guidance when Evelyn would be ready. God helped me see His streams flowing in the desert for her. Sometimes Evelyn would turn to the altar after Communion and blow a kiss to Jesus. Remember how she would wish everyone the Lord's peace as they wheeled her out after worship? Once I was frustrated when she was trying to teach me a few of the fourteen verses she knew of “Jesus Loves Me.” Finally she reached over and patted me on the hand: “It's okay,” she said, “You'll get it.”

Another sister at that group home, Carol Naideth, was so quiet. But her joy in Jesus always showed in her sparkling eyes to come to worship in God's house – **Steady strength** in a humble heart.

Remember William Snow? No one knew how he got his name. I envision a snowy day when he was dropped off as a baby at a state orphanage. Maybe someone on the staff liked the name “William.” Mostly I remember giving him Holy Communion. He liked to bless me with the sign of the cross as I blessed him. Totally dependent, William never worried about anything. He just trusted the Lord.

Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way; say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, do not fear; your God will come, he will come with vengeance; with divine retribution he will come to save you." In childlike faith we commit ourselves to God for **Steady strength**.

✠ **Joyful energy (vv.5-7)**

Sometimes when we're sure we can see, we're actually blind. When we think we hear just fine, we're deaf. Spiritually, we all are blind and deaf by nature. One young man behind a doorbell in the Spring of 1987, had the world by the tail. Life was good. Footloose and fancy free, living with his girlfriend, he had no use for organized religion. And he never told me to get lost. So I kept visiting. Steve Williams and his girlfriend brought her niece to worship in Snail Lake School. Niece's name was Lisa, now the wife of Dennis Lindboe, the grandson of Clarence and Ann Bocklund. All were blessings from that one doorbell of Steve Williams. Since Sales Manager Steve sold Buicks, and I owned a Buick, whenever I got my oil changed, I visited with him. Not once did he ever tell me to get lost.

One morning in January of 1992, Steve called. In a hoarse whisper he said he had inoperable lung cancer and ten months to live. Now God had his attention. Steve immediately started our BIC (Bible Information Class). As his body wasted away, his **Joyful energy** increased. He was so grateful for God's grace getting through to him, he wore a purple athletic suit so people would ask him. To California and back with his buddies on motorcycles, Steve told everyone who would listen how God saved him. *"Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert."* On the day our Lord called Steve home to heaven, the round stained glass window he designed and donated was installed above our altar. His **Joyful energy** still shines in our bright mission statement.

Few knew her here, but now and then two of Dorothy Lindig's Sunday School students, sisters Virginia and Ardele, still visit us. An only child, Dorothy lived alone long after her parents went home to glory. When I asked if she ever felt lonely, she looked at me incredulously, "But, Pastor, I'm never alone." She trusted Jesus as her ever present, ever loving Savior. On her deathbed she kept asking how we could help travelers who had no place to stay. Dorothy took one college class after high school, bookkeeping to help her manage her parents' estate. As you enjoy our fellowship hall, classrooms and kitchen, expanded in 2004, thank God for the **Joyful energy** He gave Dorothy Lindig to help with that.

✠ **Highway to heaven (vv.8-10)**

Springtime, 1993, something strange happened. In the busy season of Lent, somehow the Holy Spirit had me out making calls. After a few hundred homes there was one more trailer to visit next to County Road J. In the months that followed Lars and Genevieve Johnson took BIC and publicly confirmed their faith in Jesus. Soon they were homebound, yet always glad to receive Christ's body and blood in His Holy Supper. God's **Highway to heaven** finally took them home. Daughter Sherri lived in that trailer until last week. Late afternoon Thursday, sister Donna called to say Sherri was dying at Mercy Hospital. After one wrong turn, I got to the ICU while she was still breathing. During my devotion, as I sang two verses of "Abide with Me," Sherri breathed her last. Home at last with Ma, Pa, and Jesus.

None of these were prominent members, but all were on that *"highway...of holiness,"* thanks to the Holy Spirit in Word and sacrament. Think of them when your life seems to be going nowhere. Remember who you are, whose you are, and where you're headed. You're not pursuing life and liberty – other way around. With David we say in Psalm 23: *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life...."* You are *"ransomed"* with the blood of Christ. *"The ransomed of the LORD,"* because He put His Name on you in Baptism. On God's **Highway to heaven** *"the ransomed of the LORD will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads. Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away."* In Sherri's peaceful eyes I saw **The Glory of New Life**. Christ has died! Christ is risen! Christ will come again! With all God's children we gladly say, *"and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* Amen.