

Romans 6:3-4
July 9, 2018 – Funeral: Frederick Karl Schmugge

All the Way Home with Jesus

In the Name of Jesus Christ who loved us and freed us from our sins, dear loved ones of Fred Schmugge:

Imagine a young pastor driving back and forth from Prairie du Chien, WI, wife and two children there, needing a place to stay here – always the home of Fred and Doris Schmugge was open to me. No hotel could have matched those accommodations because no one else had Doris' cooking and baking such sweet treats. And nowhere else would you find a retired pastor, now a lay servant of the Lord, sharing so much community information. In between discussions there was whistling, not just any tune, but, "Hark! The Voice of Jesus Crying..." (CW 573:1,4) In those words are almost the whole heart of Fred.

For the complete picture you need to know more. "Draft copy," 10/20/04, three pages of "Funeral Wishes" updated several times, list today's hymns, request no eulogies and note that "a Bible-believing Lutheran pastor will be able to build a funeral sermon from these thoughts to the glory of God." And out of the whole Bible of 66 books and so many chapters, what two verses did Fred ask that we consider today? Romans 6:3-4 take us back to where it all began for Fred, how it continued and never ends.

"Don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?" Obeying Christ's command and trusting God's promise, Fred parents brought him to the Word-powered water of Baptism as a member of **"all nations,"** lost and condemned in sin and fully in need of that miraculous cleansing. Fred confessed: **"sinful from the time my mother conceived me."** (Psalm 51:5) Nor did grace stop there. Parents, pastors, Sunday School teachers, professors, Christian friends continued to guide and instruct Fred in God's ways. I always found a soft, grace-filled heart receptive to correction as long as it came from God's Word. Try imposing human opinion, and you'd discover a solid faith that kept on investigating the boundless wisdom of God treasured up for us in the Bible.

By memory Fred could take you back through the earlier chapters of Romans to confess why he personally treasured his own Baptism. Jews and Gentiles are united all under sin. Inspired by God the Holy Spirit, the Lord's Apostle Paul marshals quote after quote from the Old Testament: ***As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God."*** (Romans 3:10f; 12-24 NIV84) With nothing to offer God but our sin, what but grace could save us?

That Word-powered grace was not done with Fred. In youth he joined his siblings constantly cleaning and working at Mount Olive Lutheran Church in Saint Paul. For him it was natural to attend the Saint Louis Seminary of the LCMS, then apply Romans 16:17 and join the ELS ministerium to keep the truth and purity of God's Word clear and disciplined in life and ministry. This baptismal grace was so precious, Fred noticed a pocket of neighborhoods surrounding his home in Vadnais Heights. "Here am I, send me," for Fred meant demographic studies, petitioning the MN DMB, and welcoming this new missionary in the summer of 1986. Three years of set-up / take-down, attendance roller coasters at Snail Lake Elementary, land search, property purchase and building here in 1990 – all followed in humble, faithful service. Looking back, I see so many faces still with us that have shown that bright baptismal grace shining through in willing hands and loving hearts, forgiving each other as forgiven by God. And who can forget the painting crews with Fred always sporting his paper hat and looking good. Praise God!

Do you see what I see? This is the second verse of Fred's sermon text: ***"We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life."*** (Romans 6:4 NIV84) That God-given righteousness received by faith, created by the Holy Spirit in baptism, brought peace and joy to Fred and all who knew him. Like the living water of an artesian well, new life needs an outlet. It could be

faithfulness as an engineer for Sperry-Remington. When a coworker did not like Fred's attention to detail and made a mocking sign saying, "Hero!" Fred displayed it prominently on his desk for all to see. What did it matter as long as Christ is glorified? When churches plunged into the lies of evolution, Fred helped found the Twin Cities Creation Science Association with Bill Overn. In those early years Fred would sometimes attend WELS pastoral conferences. As passengers to one in Duluth, he shared this association with me. Then he proceeded to answer four hours of questions all the way up and back, my fastest trip, as Fred had studied dinosaurs, fossils, fun facts and full disclosure. His lectures at New Life were enjoyed.

How could I realize at the time that this newness of life in Christ was supplying me a mentor before our Synod formally began its mentoring program? Over the years I've come to realize that although I was permitted to serve officially, for me Fred was more the founding pastor of New Life. His liturgical knowledge was implanted by the same LCMS professor who headed the committee for the old *TLH*. Yet there was never criticism of my ignorance. Just questions about what was missing, maybe a suggestion of what could be covered more clearly and completely. This congregation and my ministry were enriched by a retired pastor who took the place of my own biological father in faithful witness and solid conviction, honoring his wife, teaching about teamwork between husband and wife – all by word and deed. What new life energy was always there! How else could you explain Fred and Doris well into their eighties raking leaves on work days? Or one earlier work day at the parsonage only one member showed up. Was that the time Fred explained to me how to "rake like a Bohemian"? Full strokes on those Minnesota leaves, not like my short stokes from ten summers raking pine needles and wood chips in Central Oregon. New life kept Fred in his minivan to drive a few blocks to see Doris every day in the memory unit at The Lutheran Home in Belle Plaine. She laughed to say she did not know the way home, but her chaplain there said she could always remember the hymns and lead the singing. And Fred never forgot to share another insight from years of studying God's Word and growing grace.

Heartaches he had. Fred's three-pages of "Funeral Wishes" are rich with winsome words to repent and receive God's full and free forgiveness in Christ. No bitterness, only "Love that found me – wondrous thought! – Found me when I sought him not," "Chief of sinners though I be..." (CW 385)

The verse that follows in Romans 6, continues the thought not just of being "*united with*" (NIV) Christ through Baptism into His death and His life, but literally being "*planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection.*" (KJV) A quote from Martin Luther:

"The apostle speaks consolingly of the death of the Christian as being planted, to show that the Christian's death and sufferings on earth are not really death and harm, but a planting unto life; being redeemed, by the resurrection, from death and sin, we shall live eternally. For that which is planted is not planted unto death and destruction, but planted that it may sprout and grow. So Christ was planted, through death, unto life; for not until he was released from this mortal life and from the sin which rested on him and brought him into death on our account, did he come into his divine glory and power. Since this planting begins in baptism, as said, and we by faith possess life in Christ, it is evident that this life must strike root in us and bear fruit. For that which is planted is not planted without purpose; it is to grow and bear fruit. So must we prove, by our new conversation and by our fruits, that we are planted in Christ unto life."¹ Lutherans have historically called their cemeteries, "God's Acre." Soon to rise again.

Luther also commented that if we could stand where Fred is now and look back, we'd exclaim to Christ, "This is so awesome! I'd go through all that a hundred times over to get to this." But Christ would reply, "Once is enough, my child, to suffer there with me. Now it will take eternity for me to bless you fully as I have desired from all eternity." Truly we say, "Eternity will be too short to utter all Thy praise!" So let us honor the grace of God in memory of our loved ones who have already passed from grace to glory. Honor them in heartfelt praise by word and deed. And God who is rich in mercy will bring us to that eternal day of the ultimate reunion in glory with God – for Jesus' sake! Amen.

¹ *Postil*. Lenker, ed. SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY, Romans 6: 3-11. Baker, 1988, Vol. VIII, pp. 146f.