

✠ THOUGHTS FOR THE FUNERAL OF DR. ANSSI SIMOJOKI ✠

*“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep,
so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.
For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him
those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13, 14*

My dear Marja and all the members of the family, relatives and friends,

It is, indeed, a great honor to be among the many who will address you today with words of comfort and hope. I have chosen this passage of Paul to the Thessalonians to highlight the hope we have in Jesus. I invite you to be encouraged by these words and urge you to LEAN ON JESUS during these difficult days and the ones ahead as you mourn and remember a dear husband, father, grandfather, fellow pastor, relative and friend.

When asked to speak at this service, it was difficult to choose the theme my words should take. Three themes immediately came to mind.

1. THE GARDEN

As one who spends time growing a large number of flowers, I have thought it would be appropriate to have spent my last breath in the garden. Surely the image of a garden is most prevalent in a Christian's mind. Jesus describes the church as a garden, and the Word we preach as the seed that bring forth life. We are blessed to be laborers in that field.

We are in this garden as a result of what happened in the first garden. It was there that death was ushered in by the sin of our first parents. Along with the sentence of death was the edict that weeds and thistles would become our concern along with the difficulty of child birth. And our lives certainly include many such thistles, including today's pain at the loss of our dear friend.

But in that first garden, a Promise was made that gave hope: A Savior would provide redemption. Fittingly, that Savior's road to Calvary began in another Garden: Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not my will, but Yours be done." The cup He was given was betrayal, denial, suffering, dying and death. He was placed in the garden that had a tomb. And on the third day He arose as the victor over sin, death and the grave.

Jesus' resurrection is victory over the grave for you and for me and for Anssi. Herein is hope for the way, for your way during these days.

2. JESUS NEVER FAILS

This was the second theme that came to mind. The words on that little plaque, which hung on wall of my parent's home for 62 years of their married life, was designed in bookmark form. Its message, shared far and wide, has been a key theme of the LHF mission that Anssi and I shared.

The message is that Jesus dealt with our deepest need, He did not fail us. Our deepest need was for the forgiveness of sins. He steadfastly set His face to bear the cross and by His suffering, death and resurrection He dealt with that need. Jesus accomplished forgiveness and earned eternal life and resurrection for Anssi and for us all.

Today I ask you: If He is able to deal with our deepest need, can He not also deal with our lesser needs? Today He is in our midst to provide hope and strength. JESUS NEVER FAILS.

3. SAILING

Surely everyone knows about Anssi's love of sailing. When news came of Anssi's death, I was in the process of preparing Volume II of the LHF history with the title JESUS NEVER FAILS.

It was ironic that the first chapter of that book opens with messages that Anssi and I shared during his faithful work as the Lutheran Heritage Foundation Vice President for Africa.

Permit me to quote from that chapter, including the message I once sent to Anssi.

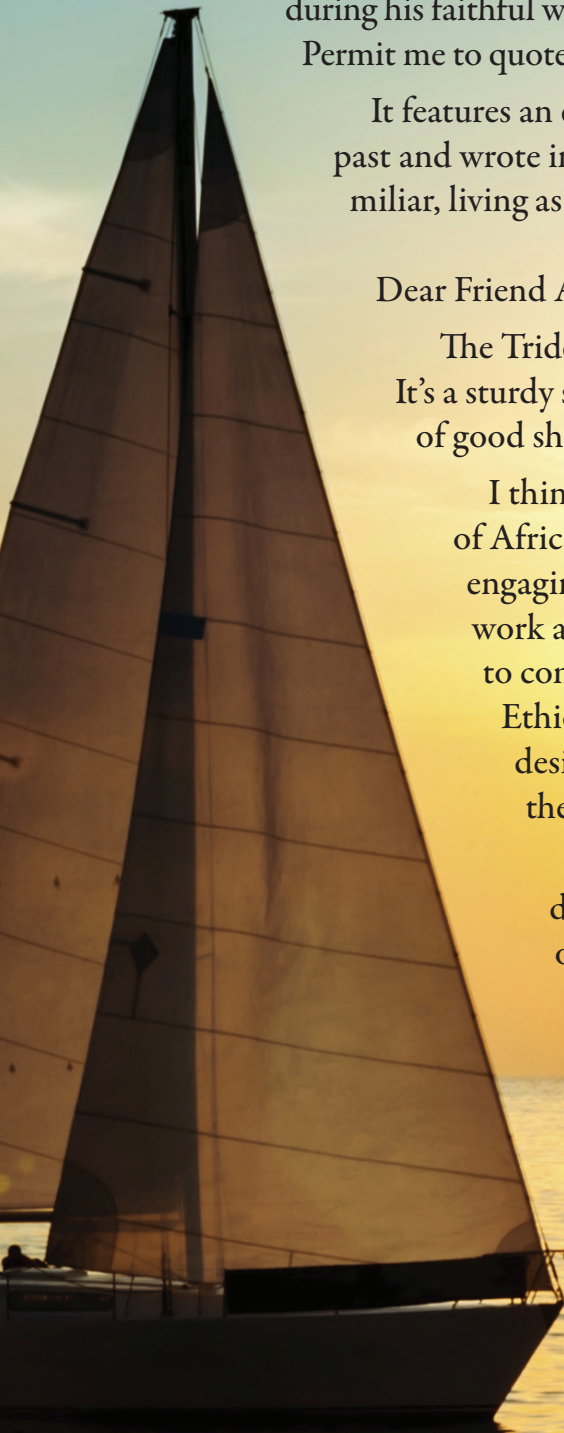
It features an exchange between Dr. Simojoki and myself as we reflected on the past and wrote in terms of sailing, an activity with which Dr. Simojoki was quite familiar, living as he did on the shores of the Gulf of Bothnia, Uusikaupunki, Finland.

Dear Friend Anssi,

The Trident, that's a good ship to sail on the waters of Europe and beyond. It's a sturdy ship filled with a precious cargo: the Word and work of God. A lot of good shipmates will help to steer the proper course.

I think back to the sailing we did together over the highways and byways of Africa. Now you are moving more towards the straits of Ethiopia and engaging Gurhan to test the waters. His coming to Karen and the resultant work as an LHF translator and now his personal embarking on the voyage to complete his studies while turning the rudders to the land around Jijiga, Ethiopia. We hope these uncharted waters will find a harbor for the desired church body being formed, the Somali Lutheran Church. With the compass of God's Word giving direction, it should be a safe landing.

The "Trident International Ship" will certainly successfully sail under the flags of LHF, LHF-Africa, and the Mission Province Church of Finland. Who would have known that when we gathered around the captain's table in what was the backyard of your Karen home in the LHF compound that one day, that our dreams would have become a reality, although different players and different organizations would be represented on the galley. Even the distant stars in the night did not clearly show what is the current manifestation. I still have the picture of us two mates wearing the hats of the jungle while sipping our tea. While there were no charts or maps laid out on the table, some distant ports were being visualized. It was a setting that we duplicated under the tree in front of the Khartoum guest house, a place where other plans were scoped and shaped for another launching.



Now the ship is being steered into the roiling waters of Finland Bay, where the dangers are more than ice flows and shallow waters. The voyage has met with the offloading of captains at the helm, and lesser trained and less noble helmsmen have come aboard and taken the ship where charts are neglected, even despised. Able captains have had their documents thrown overboard and dismissed from service. As a result, the old charts and compasses are now directing and steering the ship into the province land. There a new ship has been christened and set afloat. New harbors are opened and light-houses are showing the way. The Mission Province Church of Finland has become the life boat being steered by helmsmen who studied and know the manifest which will take thousands to the new shores of a heavenly land.

So, others are invited to come aboard the ship – not a shiny new ship, but a ship that has sailed the old course and ways. Come along and stand in the mist of the old ways, listening and heeding the word of warning: “Remove not the old landmarks thy fathers have set.” See ahead the light of the harbor and recognize it as a safe haven where the anchor can be set on the solid Truth of God’s Word.

*Sail on O soul of mine, come drink and dine,
for the food is of a substance fine, where gates to eternity are truly thine.*

*Sail on, O, lift up thy sail, the mission, it shall not fail,
though winds may buffet thy tail, His grace and mercy, they alone avail.*

The voyage has ended, the harbor has been reached. Having set the anchor solidly on the Truth of God’s Word, by grace and God’s mercy your husband, father, co-worker, friend is safe in the haven of heaven. To God be the praise and glory for His abundant grace and mercy.

JESUS NEVER FAILS. LEAN ON HIM, AND SAIL ON. Tend your garden until the call to come home.

A Shipmate,

Rev. Dr. Robert Rahn
7/31/2020

