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# Memorial Service for Andrew Fladeland, David Hansen, Sandra Jensen, and Wayne Brutlag: The Benediction of Sorrow, 1962

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## MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR

Andrew Fladeland  
David Hansen  
Sandra Jensen  
Wayne Brutlag

April 27, 1962

### The Benediction of Sorrow

Whenever death comes to a Christian as it came to our friends a few weeks ago, it never brings only a single gift. It always carries more than one thing. In the Christian view it carries joy, peace, glory and rest to the soul which is now free of the chains of mortality and ready to see God as we have not yet seen Him. We must never forget that in the Christian view death brings no sorrow to those who die. It brings it only to those who live. To those of us who remain here for a little while it brings a cup of tears, a seemingly bitter gift, the ultimate myrrh of life and living.

And so in these few brief moments this morning I do not want to talk about our friends and fellow students. They died as Christians. The tremendous effective operation of God's Holy Spirit brought them in their dying moments the memory of their childhood faith, of Christian homes where Christ was at home, of Christian parents and teachers who had kept them close to the Cross. And so they are very content and very happy now. They came to the end of the road sooner than they or we had expected, but as they know now that does not really matter. The end, whenever in life and time it comes, is always the same for the Christian--God and heaven and joy and peace. We know that because at the end what matters is not that we hold God but that He holds us.

I believe, therefore, that our friends would be the first to say that we should now think of ourselves. For us death also has a gift, but it is not easy to appreciate. Someone has said that death always makes philosophers of men. That is true. More than any other event in human existence it compels us to ask: "Why?" I am sure that everyone on our campus has asked this question again and again during the past two weeks: "Why? Why did it happen? Why did they so young and so happy have to die?" We all know, of course, that the question is not new. It has been asked by men since our first parents stood outside the gates of Paradise Lost. It is the great tolling question of the universe and of time--from palace and hut, from young and old, from rich and poor, from great and lowly it rises to the throne of judgment and of mercy. It is the great wailing cry of children lost in the night: "Why does God permit certain things to happen? Why all the pain and heartache that follows the evening sun across the world?"

More than any other fact in life death brings us face to face with this question. This is it! This is the ultimate barrier between the mind of man and the mind of God. There must be a way across or through it if we are to live sanely and happily, in fact, if we are to live at all. Without some answer life would be desolation. It would become a world of broken hearts and empty arms, cruel, senseless, brutal and blind, utterly without meaning and without hope.

For one and only one type of person there is an answer. It is an answer not of logic or reason of philosophy. It is the answer which is the great benediction of sorrow even of the final sorrow of death. It is the blessed assurance, beyond tears and beyond hope, brought by the power of the Spirit of God that God is in this! It is the knowledge that He uses even death to bring the golden gift of a stronger faith and a surer hope. It is the sureness that the cleansing fire of sorrow leaves not ashes but warmth--the strange warmth that comes from our God-given knowledge of the fact that God loves us--loves us enough to blind our eyes with tears that we may see Him more clearly--loves us enough to break our hearts so that they will be mended in Him--loves us enough to remind us again and again that we have here no continuing city--that life is a pilgrimage whose length is uncertain but whose end is sure.

This I would like to suggest to you is the meaning of the seeming tragedy that has come over us. This is the benediction of sorrow! If it does not mean this, what in the name of God can it mean? There is only one other possible answer--the answer which so many in our generation have given--that all of this really means nothing--that it is no more and no less than the crushing of an insect under our feet, the falling of a leaf or the withering of a flower. I prefer, and I think you should too this morning, the other answer--that God is in this--that beyond the white stillness of death is the white mercy of God over a cross, holding our friends now and all of us in His everlasting arms, giving them the benediction of glory and the rest of us the benediction of sorrow and of hope.

In the light of that two-fold benediction we know exactly what happened on the evening of April 13 on a Wisconsin road. An angel stood before the Throne of God, white and still, and the voice of God came to him: "I have some children down there now who are ready to come home." And so there was another presence on the dark highway that night standing invisible among on-lookers, police and the curious crowd which always gathers at such accidents. At God's own moment the angel took their souls into his hands and began the long journey upward--beyond the stars, beyond all worlds, beyond all time, to the land whose place we do not know. The journey began in darkness, the darkness of earth and of sin, of Friday night, April 13. But as the angel flew there was a great and greater light, brighter, whiter, stronger, until the whole universe was full of the searching majesty and mercy of God Himself. The angel came to the Throne of God with the souls of our friends--David, Sandra, Wayne and Andrew--



and left them there. God looked at them, not for the first time. He had seen them and loved them from all eternity. They, however, looked at God for the first time, and what they saw we cannot imagine. But what they heard we know. They heard the great choirs of heaven chanting: "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing." And God bent down from His throne and wiped away all tears from their eyes. And they knew no more sorrow but only benediction. And I am content to leave them there, David, Sandra, Wayne and Andrew, to say goodbye for a few years in the great words of our liturgy: "Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them."

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