

**MEMORIAL SERVICE**  
**William H. Johnson**  
**August 17, 1929 - May 11, 2010**

**"A Man Who Embodied God's Greatest Gift"**

**The Apostle Paul** was having a difficult time dealing with the contentious folk in the Church at Corinth. Filled with unbridled arrogance and pettiness, they were constantly at each other's throats over who possessed the most spiritual of gifts. In the end, Paul admonished them to seek the greatest gift of all--the gift of unconditional, sacrificial love. And then he went on to describe the beautiful facets of this love in the hymn known to us as I Corinthians 13....

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*

**4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup>or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup>it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup>It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.**

**8 Love never ends.** But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup>For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup>but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end.

<sup>11</sup>**When I was a child,** I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup>For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup>And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

**Over my many years of ministry** I have had the pleasure of knowing fine Christian folk who were patient and kind. I have known persons who were humble and easy to get along with.

**I have indeed encountered** those who were filled with faithfulness and integrity. But I have met few who embodied *all* the facets of such unconditional, sacrificial love. Bill Johnson was such an individual.

**Of all the illustrative words** I could share in paying tribute to Bill Johnson's life, the bottom line is he was simply a man who loved. He was a man who sought to love God with all his heart mind, soul and strength. And out of this deep devotion to his Creator flowed a constant spring of love for his wife Carolyn, his family, his fellow church members, his neighbors...and anyone he encountered along life's pathway.

**From the youngest** of the young to the oldest of the old, Bill held a gentle compassion for everyone he met. His patient and kind spirit, his unpretentious and winsome personality, his positive and encouraging nature, his impeccable character and quick wit were known by us all. He was a gentleman in the truest sense of the word. He sought to live his life in a way that Christ could always be seen. He embodied Christ's love for others...and that is the greatest gift of all.

**Whenever a new church is formed,** there is a desperate need for strong leadership and teaching. Bill fulfilled that role here at Vision of Hope. He was a lifelong student of God's Word, and he had that unique ability of making that Word come alive for others as he led Bible studies. He presented Biblical truth in a profound, yet simple, manner that others could grasp hold of.

**As a pastor,** I always appreciated Bill's wise counsel. There wasn't much he hadn't seen or heard in his many years of serving Christ in the Church. In those tough early years as we struggled in the building of this Church, he would drop by the office and offer a listening ear to my frustrations. He constantly encouraged me to "keep the faith--it's going to happen!" And it did... He was a dear friend and caring mentor to me.

**Yes, today is a day of shedding tears** for us all. We will sorely miss Bill Johnson and the love he had for each of us. And yet today is foremost a day of rejoicing as we celebrate Bill's eternal homecoming.

**These past several months** were hard months for Bill. He fought a ferocious battle with cancer. But Bill's faith remained unwavering--faith in the One who proclaimed "*I am the resurrection and the life--they who believe in me, though they die, yet shall they live!*"

**Bill believed this with ever fiber of his being**--to the point that he grew impatient in his desire to be with the Lord! He told us over and over again--"I'm ready to go!" He received the fulfillment of his longing this past Tuesday.

**Early that evening Bill let go of the tether** of this world and took hold of his Savior's hand. His Lord led him peacefully through the valley of the shadow of death, and he emerged on the other side in the Promised Land, made whole again in the Master's presence. The strife was over, the battle won. No more pain, no more struggle.

**Certainly Bill saw the face of God** more clearly than most of us, but that vision was still but a dim reflection in a mirror. Now Bill beholds God face-to-face in the realm of eternity. He has heard the words of his Lord: "*Well done, my good and faithful servant--enter into the joy of your Master!*"

**Bill has left us a legacy**--a legacy of God-given unconditional, sacrificial love. May we strive to embody this greatest gift of God in our own lives for one another and all whom we meet.

**Indeed, when I think of Bill's journey,** these words of the Apostle Paul come to mind....Paul, near the end of his days, a life in which he experienced both joyous and hard times, shared these words of introspection with his young friend Timothy:

***For I am ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth, there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall award to me on that day, and not to me only, but to all who long for his appearing.***

**Yes, my dear friends,** we can indeed rejoice with our dear brother, Bill Johnson, for to him death is not the end but a wonder-filled new beginning! He fought the good fight through times of tremendous pain, he finished the race, and my how he kept the faith throughout!

**And now he has laid hold** of that glorious crown of righteousness, a crown that will never tarnish nor fade, which is his for all eternity in the heavenly realm of our Lord!

**One final note....**Bill loved the ocean--the cool breezes, the refreshing salt air. Perhaps it came from his days of serving his country in the Navy SeaBees. He spent many wonderful vacations with his family at the seashore. It is certainly fitting that we close today's service with Tennyson's immortal poem,

### ***Crossing the Bar***

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea.

But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home!

Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!  
And may there be no sadness of farewell,  
When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place  
The flood may bear me far,  
I hope to see my Pilot face to face  
When I have crossed the bar.

**Praise be to God for the victory of resurrection! Amen!**