

My condolences today to Betty, Luana and Phillip, Diana and Alan, Ria and Jeffrey, Lonnie and Anne, and David and Ariel as well as many grandkids, great grandkids, other family and friends as well as parishioners gathered here today.

On this day that we mourn the passing of our friend, father, grandfather, and husband, I want to proclaim to you JESUS OUR SAVIOR PILOTED HIS BROTHER GRANT.

I asked that this mirror be used as an illustration in today's sermon, and I want to have each point of my sermon tie into an aspect of this piece of art a pastor's wife at a former congregation made for Grant. First, it's important that we know I. Jesus piloted Grant.

Perhaps the most obvious feature of this mirror is the American Airlines plane. We are thankful for Grant's service to our country having served in the Air Force as a pilot and Captain. He flew many hours in planes such as the iconic B-52. It is fitting that a veteran would pass away on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July.

Grant told me the story of a pastor and a pilot who both got to heaven at the same time, and when they got to the pearly gates, the pastor received a rod of iron for his faithful service on earth. On the other hand, the pilot received a rod of gold. When the pastor asked the apostle Peter why the pilot got such a nicer trophy, Peter replied, "When you were at work, you mostly just put people to sleep. When the pilot was at work, an entire plane of people were praying!" Thank you Grant, for helping us pray.

On the topic of piloting, I want to draw your attention to our reading from Luke 12:22–37 which Grant chose for this service. As we consider Grant's life as a pilot, certainly Jesus' encouragements in this text not to worry but to stay awake must have resonated with Grant. Long hours on the plane, being stationed not knowing if he'd be called into fly a mission, even long commercial flights all must have weighed on him.

Yet Jesus gives us this encouragement in Luke 12: "**Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them.**" Grant had faith throughout his life in his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He stayed awake spiritually, ever excited for Jesus' return, ever watching for the ways the Lord might act in his life. Jesus was pleased to serve Grant, even as Grant kept spiritually awake in the Holy Spirit. Jesus was pleased to pilot Grant. Even now, you need not be afraid or worry. Don't be anxious, people of God! Grant is in Jesus' caring hands, not dead, but alive, awaiting the resurrection of the body.

Our next point is: II. Jesus saved Grant. Not only do we see a plane in this mirror, we see Jesus. Not only diligent to run through takeoff checklists, but Grant was also a man of faith who took the Bible seriously. He would attend Thursday

Bible study with us weekly. One daughter shared with us how important it was to him that every sermon rightly divided law and gospel.

As we draw our focus to the Epistle reading from Romans 8, to be certain, Gospel good news oozes from it. However, the Law is also clear. To say that Jesus saved Grant means to underline that Grant had to be saved. Saved from what?

Saved from sin. Saved from the condemnation of the devil. Saved from death. Saved from hell. We know the reason that Grant died is that he has sinned throughout his life. Death is the natural result of our failure to live up to God's standards.

Grant's joke about the pilot with the rod of gold versus the pastor with the rod of iron might be how some actually think heaven works. His is kind of a silly example, but some think that when we are at the gates of heaven, we will be able to work our way in through our resumé. One might say, "I attended church so many Sundays, you gotta let me in!" Another might say, "I spent millions helping the poor and underprivileged, my spot must be reserved." Still another might say, "I spent every Saturday morning volunteering at the animal shelter. Let me in to be with Jesus, the Lion of Judah."

You might think statements like that are good news, Gospel. But all of those statements are asking to be judged by the Law. It doesn't matter whether you're a pastor or a pilot, the gates of eternal life are closed to those who think by their own works or good deeds they can inherit eternal life. The law condemns us who think we can earn God's favor. We can't do that.

Grant would often talk about the book "God is my Co-Pilot" written by Robert L. Scott, a World War II flying ace. However, he would say that that is incorrect, I am God's co-pilot. Jesus was the one flying the plane, so to speak.

Paul in Romans tells us that it's God who justifies. It is Christ who is interceding for us. Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Grant didn't believe God is my Co-Pilot who tapped his shoulder occasionally to adjust the yoke here and there. Grant believed in the one who said, "**Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.**" Grant's yoke was light because Jesus took the control wheel. We read in Romans: "**For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" Even in death, even as Grant flew high in the sky, Jesus watches over him. Jesus has saved him. Jesus loves him. That is Good News. *That* is Gospel. The mirror is not just Grant and his plane. It's Grant and His plane with Jesus right there every step of the way.

Our last point is III. Jesus is Grant's brother. What's left to point out in this mirror? You can't see it from where you're sitting, but if you came closer, you'd

see your reflection. The big picture is not just the frosted image of Grant, Jesus, and an airplane. When you stand in front of this mirror, you're part of the picture also. Grant was happy to have you as part of the picture.

Our last text is one that Grant chose from Matthew 12:46–50. When we met to plan the funeral, some of us wondered if this was chosen by accident because it is an unusual text for a funeral, but I think I can see Grant's logic.

Grant would always be so excited when he told me that family was coming to visit. There was a twinkle in his eye when he shared with me a son, daughter, or grandchild was here in La Crosse. He loved his family. But just as special to him was the importance of his church family.

**“And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, Jesus said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**” Grant was above all a churchman. He was involved in leadership at the various churches at which he served. He loved his brothers and sisters in Christ.

This ties back into our Gospel good news. None of the Simmons kids chose to be born. None of you chose to have brothers or sisters, it was just something that happened outside of your control.

Grant was welcomed into God's family through the waters of baptism and in this gift, Jesus became his brother and God became his Father. It was apart from anything he chose or did. This is Gospel. This is grace: God choosing Grant even before the foundation of the world.

As we celebrate this day that Grant is in heaven—no longer suffering, no longer sinning, no longer slowed down by the frailties of old age—we give thanks to Grant's brother, Jesus, who did it all for him, even without him asking.

As you reflect upon the events today, imagine your reflection in this mirror and what it means to be part of the picture. Families can be complicated: earthly families just as much as the family that is the Church. But no matter your experience with the Church, today is a day to reconsider joining or rejoining the community of believers that Grant treasured so much.

Grant's confirmation verse was 2 Timothy 3:14 **“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.”** Peace and salvation comes as the truths of God's Word is regularly instilled in us, and as we receive the gifts of God's forgiveness until Christ calls us home. Jesus is Grant's brother, and all Christians are blessed to have such a loving big brother care for us, and walk with us every step of the way. We thank this brother for caring for Grant throughout his earthly life, and we look forward to the “family” reunion that will happen when we see Grant and all believers in the life to come. Amen!