

Funeral Sermon
for
Claude Cole

October 11, 2011
Penzien-Steele Funeral Home
Bay City, Michigan

Pastor Richard D. Starr
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Dear Gertrude, family and friends of our dear departed brother, Claude Cole,

Over the past nine years, I've had the privilege of visiting Claude and Gertrude every other month to share God's Word and Holy Communion with them. Over those years, their places of residence changed, from their home on L & L Court to an apartment and a medical care facility in Bay City to an apartment and Tendercare in Midland. Tendercare is where I visited Claude and Gertrude on the day before the Lord moved Claude one more time—this time permanently home to heaven.

It is natural for you to mourn the loss of your loving husband and father. Gertrude, you and Claude were married for almost 60 years. Do you realize what a tremendous accomplishment and blessing from God that is these days when so many marriages end in divorce? By the grace of God, you and Claude made it, and were even able to share a room together at Tendercare.

As the children and grandchildren of Claude, you know that you were blessed to have him with you on this earth as long as you did. Heart trouble ran in his family and Claude had his first heart attack in his 40s. He had several others over the years, but by God's grace, he survived. You were able to enjoy his love, his smile and laugh, his down-to-earth enjoyment of life for many years, thanks be to God.

But we can also rejoice that Claude's earthly difficulties, struggles, and weaknesses are all finished now, that he has finished race, and that his soul is safely with our Savior-God in heaven.

Today for your comfort and encouragement I would like to share with you the same Word of God that I shared with Claude on the day before our Lord called him home to heaven. It is written in the Old Testament book of Joshua, chapter 1, verses 6 to 9. **"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not**

commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." NIV

Joshua needed words of encouragement, just as you do today. Moses—the great leader who led Israel out of their slavery in Egypt, who led them to the gates of the Promised Land, not once but twice, both before and after he led them for 40 years in the desert, who wrote the first five books of the Bible, whom the Bible says that the Lord knew face to face—Moses was dead. He wasn't allowed to enter the Promised Land, but died just before the Israelites were to finally enter the home that God had promised to them. And now the mantle of leadership passed to Joshua. Those were some pretty big sandals to fill, don't you think?

Joshua needed encouragement and God gave it to him. Three times he uses the phrase, "**Be strong and courageous.**" Joshua would be able to lead the children of Israel across the Jordan River. Joshua would be able to lead them into the Promised Land. Joshua would be able to lead them as they took possession of the land, drove out the people who lived there, and divided up the land among the twelve tribes of Israel. Why? Because God said so. God had promised over and over that his people would inherit this land, and now God promised Joshua that he would be the one to lead them. God promised it and that was all Joshua needed. That is why Joshua could be strong and courageous.

What is the only thing that can give us encouragement today? What is the only thing that can save us? The very same thing: the promises of God. God's promise to send a Savior to live and die in our place, a promise he fulfilled 2,000 years ago; God's promise to cover our sins and guilt with the blood of Jesus, his own Son, the only thing that could win God's favor; God's promise to bring us back from the dead and give us the eternal reward that Jesus won for us. Those promises are basis for our comfort, the basis for our confidence, the basis for our faith, the basis for our salvation. That's why we want to hear and study God's Word where those promises are written. We want and need to "**meditate on it day and night.**"

In your grief, sorrow, and struggles today and in the weeks ahead, "**Be strong and courageous.**" Don't give up! Don't be afraid! Don't get discouraged! Trust in God's promises. As you continue to meditate on his Word, he will continue to give you the peace of forgiveness through Jesus, the joy of a new relationship with him as your heavenly Father, and the hope of an eternity with him in heaven. And through it all, know that "**the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.**" Amen.