FUNERAL – *ERMA WEBER – 3/24/97 – AGE 89 – IN NOMINE JESU*

LAST WEDNESDAY I VISITED ERMA IN THE HOSPITAL & I ASKED HER IF SHE WAS ABLE TO EAT YET. SHE SAID, "YES, A LITTLE BIT." I SAID, "WOULD YOU LIKE HOLY COMMUNION?" SHE SAID, "O YES." WE BEGAN, "O CHRIST, THOU LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKEST AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD, HAVE MERCY ON US! O CHRIST, THOUS LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKEST AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD, HAVE MERCY ON US! O CHRIST, THOU LAMB OF GOD THAT TAKEST AWAY THE WIN OF THE WORLD, GRANT US THY PEACE! WE WENT ON TO PRAY TOGETHER, ENDING WITH "JESUS, YOU SAID.'I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE! IF ANYONE EATS OF THIS BREAD, HE WILL NOT DIE, BUT LIVE FOREVER' – MY BODY BROKEN; MY BLOOD SHED FOR YOU!" MARTIN LUTHER MAKES A BIG POINT OF THE FACT THAT WE HUMAN BEINGS ARE SLL BROUGHT BACK INTO A VITAL, LIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR GREAT GOD AT A TREMENDOUS PRICE – "NOT WITH GOLD OR SILVER" BUT WITH JESUS' OWN "HOLY & PRECIOUS BLOOD & WITH HIS INNOCENT SUFFERING & DEATH." JESUS DID THIS "THAT WE MIGHT BE HIS OWN & LIVE UNDER HIM IN HIS KINGDOM & SERVE HIM IN EVERLASTING RIGHTEOUSNESS, INNOCENCE & BLESSEDNESS, EVEN AS HE IS RAISED FROM THE DEAD, LIVES & REIGNS TO ALL ETERNITY." MY HOPE & PRAYER FOR YOU TODAY IS THAT YOU HOLD & KEEP THAT VISION! THE EARLY CHRISTIANS REFERRED TO THE DATE OF ONE'S DEATH AS "ONE'S BIRTHDAY" – NOT THE END BUT THE BEGINNING. "CHRIST HAS ABOLISHED DEATH & HAS BROUGHT LIFE & IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL."

ERMA TOLD ME SHE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO GOING BACK HOME WITH YOU, RALPH, INSTEAD, SHE HAS GONE HOME TO BE WITH JESUS. DURING THIS HOLY WEEK WE REMEMBER ONCE MORE HOW JESUS WENT ALONG THE *VIA DOLOROSA* – THE WAY OF SORROWS – TO BE NAILED TO THE CROSS. THINK ABOUT THAT. GOD LOVED ERMA & THE LIKES OF YOU & ME THAT HE GAVE HIS ONE & ONLY SON TO THIS OBSCENE HORROR & TORMENT THAT WE MIGHT HAVE THE GIFT OF ETERNAL LIFE. JESUS' WORD RINGS OUT ACROSS A DARK & DYING WORLD, "BECAUSE I LIVE, YOU SHALL LIVE ALSO." YOU MUST NEVER WEAKEN IN YOUR FAITH ABOUT THE NEW LIFE. IT IS NOT ONLY THE ASSURANCE THAT ALL OUR SINS ARE FORGIVEN, BUT THAT HE WHO FORGAVE THEM BY HIS DEATH ON THE CROSS NOW LIVES ETERNALLY & WE SHALL LIVE WITH HIM.

CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT IT WAS LIKE WHEN JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD & ASCENDED INTO HEAVEN? -- THAT MAGNIFICENT MOMENT WITH THE WHOLE COMPANY OF HEAVEN? -- THOUSANDS UPON THOUSANDS OF ANGELS? -- THEY ARE ALL GATHERED AROUND THE THRONE AT THE RIGHT HAND OF THE FATHER – BOWING IN HOLY

REVERENCE – WELCOMING JESUS BACK HOME IN ALL THE GLORY AND MAJESTY OF HIS RESURRECTION FROM THE DEAD? CAN YOU JUST PICTURE THAT FIRST EASTER MORNING?..... NOW CHANGE YOUR FOCUS! PICTURE ERMA BEING WELCOMED BY ALL THE ANGELS & ARCHANGELS – NOT BECAUSE SHE DESERVES IT – NONE OF US DOES – BUT BECAUSE OF WHAT JESUS DID FOR HER & FOR ALL OF US ON CALVARY. CAN YOU SEE JESUS REACHING OUT WITH HIS NAIL-SCARRED HANDS TO EMBRACE HER? "WELCOME HOME, ERMA, WELCOME HOME! ..... COME YOU BLESSED OF MY FATHER, INHERIT THE KINGDOM PREPARED FOR YOU FROM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD! ..... WELCOME HOME!"