

**+ 2 Timothy 4:7-8 + The Fight Is Over! The Victory Won! +  
+ Christian Victory Service of Berthold Alwin Toensing + 9 June 2012 +**

Dear Family and Friends of Bert Toensing, especially you dear Kara and Crista,

Over the years, there was something unmistakable about your father and grandfather. Bert Toensing never gave up. He didn't back down easily. He knew where he stood and often there was no reason in the world why that position should change. Some might even say he was a little stubborn.

Now at times that attitude could make life interesting. When it came to his opinions about a wide range of subjects from how to dig the proper post hole to politics and the economy to what he thought the doctors were really telling him, Bert usually didn't back down. He knew where he stood and often there was no reason in the world why that position should change.

Yet the Lord also used that persistent, confident, never-give-up mindset for great blessing. You could even say it was a special gift from God. When it came to his family, there was no giving up even when times got tough. When it came to his church, giving up was not an option, especially when it came to the pure teaching of God's Word. When it came to his Christian faith, his life as a child of God, there could be no giving up, because giving up on Christ and his Word could have devastating results. So he spent his life—81 years, 4 months, and 26 days—fighting for his family and his church, for the true teaching of God's Word and for true faith in Christ. Giving up was not an option as long as the **"good fight"** was still to be fought, but on May 25, the Lord in his grace allowed his faithful servant to lay down his arms because **THE FIGHT IS OVER! THE VICTORY WON!**

**"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith."** When the Apostle Paul wrote those words, he could see that the end of his earthly life was coming soon. He would soon be martyred for his Christian faith, and the prospect of death caused him to look back on his life and ministry. He had spent at least thirty years contending for the faith—struggling for the Gospel and remaining faithful to Christ and his Word. For thirty years, Paul's sole focus was to point people to Jesus and hold on to Jesus himself. It was a life filled with great joy and blessing, but much of it was difficult and challenging. It was like he had been in a fight to the death for thirty years. It was such a desperate fight because of sin.

Paul, of all people, knew he was a sinful human being. From conception he had been a natural enemy of God. He had willfully trusted in his own works to earn God's favor and had even persecuted the Christian church. He deserved God's just punishment of death—both physical and eternal, but God in his grace and mercy brought Paul to faith through his almighty Word and the cleansing waters of Holy Baptism. As a child of God, Paul realized how desperately he needed Christ Jesus his Savior, and the Lord used him to take that good news of Jesus to countless people in the Roman world.

In the meantime, Paul also realized how desperate **"the good fight of the faith"** really was. Daily he struggled to resist the temptations of his own sinful flesh and of the world around him. Daily he fought to remain faithful to Christ and his Word. Daily he sought to keep running the race of his Christian life with all its joys and sorrows, challenges and blessings. Daily he fought to **"keep the faith"**—to cling to both true faith in Christ and the true teaching of God's Word to the end. He was like an athlete struggling and fighting and contending to the end to win. Giving up was not an option. He absolutely did not want to lose that **"good fight of faith"**, because at the end was a heavenly prize of grace.

Yet none of that struggling and fighting and contending was even possible for Paul if not for Jesus. You see, Paul fought **"the good fight of the faith"** because Jesus fought that fight for him first. Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth, left the glories of heaven to fight for every one of our souls. Giving up was absolutely not an option. So Jesus poured every fiber of his being into contending for the faith. Unlike you and me, he perfectly resisted the temptations of Satan and the sinful world around him. He perfectly ran the race of his life and proclaimed the true teaching of God's Word. His effort never flagged. He never gave up, even when that fight, that race took him to a heavy cross on a lonely hill outside of Jerusalem. There with nails piercing his hands and feet, Jesus finished the fight for our souls. He took on himself every single one of Paul's sins and Bert's sins and your sins and mine, and he suffered the just punishment we all deserve—death. Before he died, however, Jesus declared the victory won. **"It is finished!"** (John 19:30) Then to prove he was the victor, Jesus took his life back up again three days later as he rose from the dead. The fight was over. The victory was won and it was certain.

Like St. Paul, Bert didn't want to lose the **"good fight of the faith"** either. Like every one of us, he, too, was a sinful human being from conception, a mortal enemy of the holy God deserving his wrath, but God in his grace

and mercy rescued Bert from an eternity in hell. It all began the day after he was born—New Year's Eve 1930. On that day at St. John's Hospital in St. Paul, MN, Berthold and Dorothea Toensing had their newborn son baptized. Through water and the Word, the Holy Spirit planted faith in Bert's heart and made him God's child, who would then spend the rest of his eighty-one God-given years running the race laid out before him with the Lord keeping him firm in the faith. Along the way, Jesus caused Bert to grow and be strengthened in his faith through the study of God's Word and through receiving the body and blood of Jesus with bread and wine in his Holy Supper for the forgiveness of his sins. Jesus kept Bert firm in the faith through the Korean War and as he started a family with your mom, Pauline.

When the Lord brought you, Kara and Crista, into your parents' lives, however, your dad's **"good fight of the faith"** became more than just personal. With Christ's help and strength, he daily fought to resist the temptations of his own sinful nature and of the world around him. He daily fought to remain faithful to Christ and his Word, but when the Lord blessed him with a family, his refusal to give up on that **"good fight of the faith"** extended to all of you. He didn't want to lose it for himself and he didn't want you or your husbands or his grandchildren or future generations to lose that fight or give up on that race and miss out on heaven. Bert knew what Jesus had done for him and he wanted you to have that confidence in Christ too.

The same was true of his congregations, whether that was St. John's in Antigua or here at Cross of Christ. Bert didn't want his congregation to give up contending for the faith and teaching the true Word of God, whether that was in the early mission years or when the Lord allowed our congregation to be without a pastor for ten years or in the recent years since we restarted. Bert didn't want to see a single soul be lost, so he did something that few people like to do. He went after those who strayed from the flock, who hadn't been in church in a long time or who were hurting for any reason at all. Bert refused to give up because Jesus never gave up on him.

Above all, Bert wanted to win the fight because he knew that at the end is a heavenly prize of grace—**"a crown of righteousness"**. For as much as Bert refused to give up, he looked forward to the glories of heaven. He longed for the reappearing of Christ. He looked forward to seeing Jesus. Without a doubt, he knew what and who was waiting for him at the end. By God's grace through faith, your dad knew exactly where he was going when the fight was over. Bert knew he didn't deserve it, but he also knew heaven would be his because of Jesus his Savior. It was just like St. Paul. **"Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing."**

That hope of what awaited Bert in the glories of heaven surely increased in the last five years as the Lord called home his grandson and his bride. As he continued to fight the good fight of the faith, it was that distant triumph song that gave him strength to keep contending for his own true faith in Jesus, for the faith of his family and his church family. On May 25, 2012, after 81 years, 4 months, and 26 days of refusing to give up, Jesus, the Lord of Life, told his faithful servant Berthold Toensing that it was time to rest from his labors. Finally he could enjoy the long-awaited glories of heaven where not only would he be with his loved ones in the Lord, but he would be with Jesus. His fight in this life was over with the victory won, but not because he impressed the Lord so much or fought so hard for him and his Word, but because Jesus had already won the victory for him on the cross and in the empty tomb. Now solely because of Christ's victory, your father enjoys God's gift of the victor's **"crown of righteousness"** in the glories of heaven.

For us who linger here, our hope remains in Jesus who won the victory for us too. Someday by grace, that **"crown of righteousness"** will be yours too. Someday your tears of sorrow will become tears of joy at the blessed reunion around the throne of the Lamb of God, because there you will see Jesus victorious. May Christ enable you to never give up fighting the good fight of the faith and to finish the race marked out for you holding tightly to him and his Word. To Christ alone be all glory and honor and praise! Amen.