This morning we gather to celebrate the life of Ronald Sterry. We gather to give thanks and praise for him and to acknowledge the gift that he was to his family and friends and community.

But we also gather because in his death we are painfully reminded of the reality of death. Death brings us together to mourn over our loss, but also to mourn over our collective condition—death is real. We are all facing death and we need to know what to think about it. What about death? We are all going to die, but is that it? Is this all there is? Is it just as the bumper sticker says, “Life is Hard then you Die?”

Nobody in this world has an answer to that question, just a lot of speculation. Science would suggest that when you die you die. However, new science now suggesting that when you die there may be something more. More and more scientists are coming to see that possibility even though they vary widely on what it might mean.

Christian faith is based at its core on the promise of life after death. We hold close to the words and promise of Jesus Christ who is so clear about what he says will happen when we die. He is so certain in fact that he is willing to put his own life on the line to prove it.

We do not know for sure exactly what happened when he died, we take it on faith. But there were at least 12 people who were there at the time, who spent the rest of their lives swearing that he rose from the dead, refusing to deny it even when tortured and killed. What had they seen that was so compelling they would believe that strongly?

Jesus promises that we have a place in heaven and that when we die he will raise us up to be with him. He is very clear about that. I want to talk about that promise, but first let me talk a little about Ronald John Sterry.

I did not know Ron personally. This was his wife’s church and the church of his children, but he did belong to a non-denominational church. I do know for certain that God will forgive him for that. After all nobody is perfect.

But I met with Ron’s family last week and they told me a little about this life that I would like to share with you now.

Ron was born in 1937 in the middle years of the Great depression in Menomonee, Wisconsin. If you asked Ron how you spell Menomonee, he will say, “Me No Money.” It really works.

His father, Jack, was a businessperson and his mother a homemaker. He was athletic and played sports in high school, including football, basketball, and baseball. He even went on to
play semi-pro baseball after high school. He was invited once to try out to as kicker for the Green Bay Packers. When asked why he did not do it he would remind you that in those days pro football players were paid next to nothing. It had to something to do with the “Me No Money” thing.

Ron was a good student, was confirmed in the Lutheran Church and graduated Menomonee High School in 1957. He married his high school sweetheart, Sharon, started a family and went into business where he excelled as a salesman.

Ron and Sharon raised four children, Randy, Rhonda, Rick, and Todd. They moved to Minnesota and settled in Bloomington in 1961, then a grown suburb with many opportunities.

Ron coached athletics, helped build the Met Center, and ended up working in construction where he built and remodeled homes.

Always the active guy, he never really retired. He worked right up until his health would no longer let him. When his physical body had finally played out, he died in the night, his eyes closed, his hands folded across his chest, and a peaceful look on his face.

He will be missed for his phone calls, especially the ones that began with, “Do you think you could...” or “Do you know anyone that can...” He kept his family busy.

He will be missed for his great presence, his voice, his ability to laugh at himself; how he could take it as well as he gave it, his deep faith, and his birthday dinners.

He will be missed for his humor. Near the end of his life while he was lamenting to Randy that he was a lot of trouble, Randy said, “Dad you’re not a burden.” To which Ron responded, “Did you say you were a virgin?”

He taught his family to be responsible for themselves, to be strong, and to never give up. He was always there to offer advice.

He was referred to as “Reverend Ron,” by those who knew him best because he had a deep and abiding faith in Jesus Christ and the promise of resurrection and life after death. He knew about eternal life and about trusting in the Lord to take care of you. He knew he had a place in heaven and always wanted others to know about too.

Toward the end of his life, he would say to his family, “I’m going to be fine, don’t worry about me. I will wait for you. Take your time, but hurry along.”

This passage of scripture from John’s Gospel was chosen because of its clear reference to eternal life. His family chose it because they knew how much Ron believed in it and wanted others to believe in it too.
Jesus said, “I am the bread of life, whoever eats this bread will live forever...” It is a pretty big promise, one that we Christians hold as the most important thing Jesus came to give us. It is a pretty amazing gift and it is at times like this that we can most appreciate how valuable and precious it is. It’s a gift that means most at moments like these, because in this moment we can know, even in the terrible sadness of the loss of a loved one, that all things are truly well. Yes, we will die, but then we will live. It is sad, but it is also wonderful. We will all discover just how wonderful one day.

In the meantime, we can live knowing that Ron and all our loved ones are alive and well with Christ. That is the best reason for joy in the midst of sorrow. Thanks be to God.