

*July 11, 2003, excerpts from Pastor Mark Harris's sermon*

*There are times when there are simply no words to say. There are no words which are able to express the grief and shock which we feel this day, as we gather as a family and a community, to celebrate the life and mourn the death of Amanda Finch, our daughter and sister, our friend and colleague. There are no words, which are able to adequately convey the unspeakable loss and anger, and helplessness which we feel, no words which are sufficient to exhaust what is in our hearts.*

*But that does not mean that there is nothing to be said. Indeed, we would not be honouring Amanda, and the life which she lived, if we allow ourselves to be stunned into silence by the inadequacy of our words. On the contrary, this is a day on which Amanda's passion for life, and her example of faith, compels us to speak with boldness, as we seek some hope beyond the events of this week.*

*In the final analysis, that is always a matter of faith. It is a matter of trusting that pain and loss do not have the final say. For the last utterance, the enduring word always belongs to God. And God's word is a promise of a new life and replenished hope. As unimaginable as it may seem to us this day, there is – beyond our heartache and loss and tears, there is beyond our questions and our vulnerability – a promise... God's promise, of new life, homecoming and reunion.*

*It is that promise which the whole Christian community celebrates in our life and ministry together. It is that promise to which Amanda was joined in the waters of baptism, the promise that – in spite of the worst that this world can throw at us, the final word always belongs to God. And God's word – in defiance of the silence of death – is a word of life, and hope and promise, both now and for eternity.*

*And Amanda knew that. In fact, I would suggest to you this day, that Amanda's life was a reflection of that.*

*Those of us who knew, and worked with, and loved Amanda, know that she lived with passion, and with faith. Her's was no faint-hearted approach to life. When Amanda made up her mind and committed herself to something, she gave it her all. (Why, some would suggest that she was downright stubborn!) There is probably no better example of this than is to be found in her dedication and enthusiasm as a paramedic. She gave it everything that she had, driven by a commitment to serve others, and by a desire to faithfully live the life that had been given to her as a gift. And for those of you, in emergencies services, who worked with Amanda, you know how much this is true, and*

*how much satisfaction and joy she found in working with you to serve the people of this community.*

*There is a sense in which Amanda found herself in giving herself away, in offering her life as a Paramedic in service to others. In so doing, Amanda was sharing in the very life of God, the life most fully exemplified by the self-giving love of Christ. What that means is this: when any person's life is a participation in that eternal life of God, they are finally a part of that which cannot pass away. You see, we make a grave mistake if we assume that the only measure of a life is only to be counted in the number of years that one walks the face of this earth. Amanda's life may have been tragically short. But as our presence here indisputably attests, her life was lived with a faith and a vitality which touched us all, such that we will now be part of her living bequest. She probably would never have imagined the difference which she has made or how our lives have been enriched by the gift of her presence.*

*And maybe, that is a part of the enduring gift, and the word of promise and new life which God is giving to us this day. Even as we live through this season of exile, this time of grief and loss, we are invited to celebrate Amanda's life. For sharing our memories, we may find ourselves revived by some of her enthusiasm and dedication, her sense of service and her passion for living. We may find that our stunned silence is slowly transformed into a song of thanksgiving.*

*That, finally, is the word which must be spoken this day. Even amidst our sorrow, we are immensely grateful for the gift of Amanda's life. We are thankful for this community with whom we can share our sorrow and memories and joy, and most of all, we are thankful to God, who gave us Amanda, the God who will support us in the days ahead, and who holds out for Amanda and for us a promise: there will be new life, reunion and homecoming for all.*