

Jay Ginter Memorial Service -- Pastoral Meditation

Phil Campbell

What can be said at time such as these when no words suffice? Laughter helps; the sharing of stories is good, but nothing changes the reality of loss. We long for magic words that will make everything all right and they do not come. But we can be together; we can join together and hold one another's hands. We can be together to uphold Jane and Jason and Sarah and Carolyn and all the family. We can uphold each other as we stare into the abyss and muster the strength to carry on.

It may sound trite, but we know that this is what Jay would have wanted. Among the many things we know about Jay was that he was a pragmatic realist. What can any of us do but keep on keeping on in all seasons, in the good times, yes, but also in the bad. Each new day presents incredible opportunities to love and serve and explore and grow. Each day, no matter how bleak, contains grace notes that affirm life as a precious gift. Jay knew that life is for living, and oh, did he live. He lived in ways that touched us, be it in his distinguished career, or raising his family, or serving his church and community, or hiking and sailing, or just reveling in life with Jane. We know how much his presence is missed. There is little in this church and throughout Juneau that was not touched by him, nor is it only here that he is missed. Those in Seattle at Seattle Cancer Care and at Queen Anne United Methodist were honored to know him. And it was a gift that he was able to be with his father and sister in West Virginia before pneumonia struck. We were all influenced by his wisdom, his insight, and his practical and caring manner. For this we say, "Thanks be to God."

As we gather today we affirm that as Jay lived, so did he die. He faced his cancer head on. He didn't back down but did what he could to contest the ailment that was ravaging his body. Among Jay's many identities was that of scientist and he was in scientific mode during part of a long and wide ranging conversation he and I had last fall – a conversation about life and death and health and struggle and the meaning of it all. Jay was back in Juneau after his stem cell transplant. He and Jane smiled about this great gift Carolyn gave, saying it increased Jay's sensitivity to have female blood coursing through his veins. He might have been more sensitive, but he was disappointed – disappointed that he wasn't feeling more energetic and that he couldn't do many of the more active things he longed to do. He was putting his analytical expertise to work trying to discover what was going on. He found it a fascinating problem and I got the idea that if it weren't for the annoying fact that it was happening to him, he would have really enjoyed trying to figure out this whole mantle cell lymphoma thing.

Yes, Jay was a scientist. He was also a person of faith, and for him there was no contradiction between his faith and his science. Jay's faith was not rooted in trying to answer the unanswerable. He knew he was not singled out for his illness. It just happened. It was the un-luck of the draw. Faith, as Jay knew, isn't so much about "why," as it is about what and how. Faith is about the desire God instills in us to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. It is about seeing a need and responding. It is about a life of service and the depth of friendship. Faith engenders compassion and kindness, and it calls us to seek peace and justice in peaceful and just ways. To the end, Jay's faith in God buoyed him in his struggles and brought him peace in all things. His faith compelled him to keep on living and was expressed in love – love that continued to grow. These last years and months were treasured ones for Jay and Jane, here and in Seattle. The time they spent together was a joy.

In faith, Jay did not dwell on what might have been; instead, Jay gave thanks for the goodness of God that he experienced. Last November, Jay wrote in his CaringBridge Journal, "I have much to be thankful for this Thanksgiving. And you?" Now it is left to us to find many things to be thankful for. The words of Psalm 30 are fitting, for our search, I think. "So sing praises to God O you saints and give thanks to God's holy name. For God's anger is only for a moment, but God's favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning." Having known Jay brings us joy, and a call to sing is something that cannot be repressed. Nothing surpasses music as an expression of faith. Singing in the hospital kept Jane and the family going, and the music in this service is an apt testimony both to Jay's love of music and to his faith.

Last month as Jay entered the final weeks of his struggle, I thought of the question that sometimes accompanies the time leading up to death: "Is our loved one ready to die?" In a way, I would have to say Jay wasn't ready, but not because he feared death, and not because he lacked assurance of God's love and grace, but just because he loved life so much. He wanted more of it – more time with Jane and Jason and Sarah. More time to travel and sail and be with Jane and family and all of us, even as we wanted more time with him. No, Jay wasn't ready to die, but he did accept that it was on the horizon. He didn't like it much but he was practical about it. It was just the way it was and he was determined to make the best of each day he was given to live. He lived with much to be thankful for and invited us to do the same.

While Jay was in the hospital in Pittsburgh, lovingly cared for by the medical team there, surrounded by family, and held up in prayer by those of us in Juneau and in all the far flung places where he had left his mark, a verse from Paul's letter to the church at Rome came to me. To the Romans Paul wrote: "if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's." This verse bears witness to how Jay, God's wise, loving, pragmatic, and compassionate servant, lived and died. In life and in death and in life beyond death, we are the Lord's. Jay knew this. May we also, this day and in all our days. Amen.