

Readings, Scripture, and Sermon from the Memorial Service for Mason Dixon Jackson, December 12, 2009

December 12, 2009

The Rev. Dr. William C. Poe
December 12, 2009
A Celebration of Life
Mason Dixon Jackson
December 26, 1974 - December 7, 2009

Sermon Text

Scripture – Psalm 139:1-18, 23-24

Lord, You have searched me out and known me;
You know my sitting down and my rising up;
You discern my thoughts from afar.
You trace my journeys and my resting-places
and are acquainted with all my ways.
Indeed, there is not a word on my lips,
but You, O Lord, know it altogether.
You press upon me behind and before
and lay Your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain to it.
Where can I go then from Your Spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?
If I climb up to heaven, You are there;
if I make the grave my bed, You are there also.
If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
even there Your hand will lead me
and Your right hand hold me fast.
If I say, “Surely the darkness will cover me,
and the light around me turn to night,”
darkness is not dark to You;
the night is as bright as the day;
darkness and light to You are both alike.
For You Yourself created my inmost parts;
You knit me together in my mother’s womb.
I will thank You because I am marvelously made;
Your works are wonderful, and I know it well.
My body was not hidden from You,

while I was being made in secret
and woven in the depths of the earth.
Your eyes beheld my limbs,
yet unfinished in the womb;
all of them were written in Your book;
they were fashioned day by day,
when as yet there were none of them.
How deep I find Your thoughts, O God!
How great is the sum of them!
If I were to count them,
they would be more in number than the sand;
to count them all,
my life span would need to be like Yours.
Search me out, O God, and know my heart;
try me and know my restless thoughts.
Look well whether there be any wickedness in me
and lead me in the way that is everlasting.

Scripture – Romans 8:31-39

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? The One who did not withhold His own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will God not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through the One who loves us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the Love of God seen in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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“Song Offering 95” from Gitanjali, by Rabindranath Tagore

I was not aware of the moment
when I first crossed the threshold of this life.
What was the power that made me open out
into this vast mystery
like a bud in the forest at midnight!
When in the morning I looked upon the light
I felt in a moment
that I was no stranger in this world,
that the inscrutable without name and form
had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.
Even so, in death the same unknown

will appear as ever known to me.
And because I love this life,
I know I shall love death as well.
The child cries out
when from the right breast the mother takes it away,
in the very next moment
to find in the left one its consolation.

* * *

“Death is Nothing at All”
By Canon Henry Scott-Holland, (1847-1918), Canon of St Paul's Cathedral

Death is nothing at all
I have only slipped away into the next room
I am I and you are you
Whatever we were to each other
That we are still
Call me by my old familiar name
Speak to me in the easy way you always used
Put no difference into your tone
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow
Laugh as we always laughed
At the little jokes we always enjoyed together
Play, smile, think of me, pray for me
Let my name be ever the household word
that it always was
Let it be spoken without effort
Without the ghost of a shadow in it
Life means all that it ever meant
It is the same as it ever was
There is absolute unbroken continuity
What is death but a negligible accident?
Why should I be out of mind
Because I am out of sight?
I am waiting for you for an interval
Somewhere very near
Just around the corner
All is well.
Nothing is past; nothing is lost
One brief moment and all will be as it was before
How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting
when we meet again!

* * *

Memorial Homily for
Mason Dixon Jackson
December 12, 2009

Sisters and brothers, gathered family and friends, we are gathered here in God's house to give God thanks for the gift of life, and particularly for the gift of Mason Jackson; to surround his family, friends, and colleagues with our prayers and acts of love and kindness, and to share the news of God's grace.

The first thing I need to say, on behalf of the whole family, is a heartfelt "Thank You" to all of you who have been praying for Mason through this ordeal. You need to know that the prayer effort meant the world to Mason's family. It was literally a worldwide prayer effort, with people communicating their love and concern, not only all over the U.S., but also in Brazil, Australia, South Africa, parts of Europe, and other places we are still finding out about. We also want to say "Thank You" to the doctors and nurses of CVICU 7A at St. Luke's Hospital. They gave competent and compassionate care to Mason, and treated family members with great sensitivity and understanding.

Secondly, I want to share with you some words from members of his family. Many of you know Mason well, but there are probably some here who know him only as they have been bound together in praying and caring for him. These are some ways you can come to know Mason more as we know him.

First, from Mason's brother, Tohner:

As all of you know, Mason was special. Anyone who had ever had a conversation longer than 30 seconds with him would know that he was brilliant, opinionated, kind-hearted, persuasive, engaging, caring, honest, and most definitely interesting. Those who really knew him, though, found him to be all that and so much more.

One thing that you might not know is what a deeply passionate, loving, and sensitive man he was, because he often kept it hidden and out of sight, but not so deeply hidden that his loved ones weren't well aware of its existence.

The thing that came to my mind shortly after hearing he had passed, happened last Christmas when my wife, Brandy, and I were expecting the birth of our baby boy, Rowan. As you might expect, we were already receiving many gifts for him from the family. One gift that stuck out in my mind and will always be hidden away like a treasure in my memories, to be taken out and shared with our son when the time comes, was a book given by my Mom, *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein. But the real gift came when my brother read it aloud to the whole family, but mostly targeted to the one who had not yet arrived. As he read it aloud you could tell that this was a story that he knew almost by heart. You see, this was out of character for my brother, a man who was not known for sentimental, public displays of affection. As we all sat by the Christmas tree, with all the wonderful gifts surrounding us, he read that story as only a soon-to-be-proud uncle could read it. As he read, I think I saw him more clearly than I had ever seen him before.

It was truly beautiful. He was truly beautiful.

There are many things that must be left unsaid, and even more things left undone when it comes to my brother's life. I will carry him with me always in my memories, to be loved and watched over as only a brother can do.

Next, from Mason's sister, Crystal:

Mason took his time entering this world but left it far too soon. With his departure, we lost a brilliant brain, a warm heart, a quick wit and a steadfast friend. He was a dynamic person, and he touched each of us in different ways. In addition to always making me laugh, Mason challenged me. Things that I thought I understood, he made me see from a totally different perspective. And though I would never admit it to him, he was almost always right. Mason never let people take themselves too seriously, and he knew how to appreciate and enjoy life. He wasn't afraid to enter uncharted territory and try something new, even though he was a person who liked to over-analyze everything. He often joked about how things would be different when he ruled the world, and I always kind of believed - and even hoped - that might happen some day. Mason was a defender of ideals, a defier of convention, a supportive friend, and a loving and loved member of our family. This life will never be the same without him.

Then, these reflections from Mason's father, Steve:

Mason was a company man. Ask any of his co-workers from his 12 years with AT&T. He was driven and loyal and brave. He gave 100% of his energy and intellect.

Mason was a family man. As his Mom, Dad, and siblings. He was loving and caring and energetic in being the best son, brother, and uncle he could be.

Mason was a renaissance man. Ask his friends. He made short movies, he built furniture, he brewed beer, he cured meat, he built gravity-powered water features, he was a traveler from New York to Carmel. He was a writer who loved to share his broad knowledge and his well considered opinions. He was a serious lover of bacon.

Mason enhanced the lives of everyone who knew him. He was a man of passion and integrity and the lives of all who knew him are diminished by his passing.

Deepak Chopra says it well, that "human beings are made of body, mind, and spirit. Of these spirit is primary, for it connects us to the source of everything, the eternal field of consciousness. ... Essentially we are spiritual beings who have taken manifestation in physical form...We're not human beings that have occasional spiritual experiences; we're spiritual beings who have occasional human experiences. ... Our essential nature is one of pure potentiality."

Mason was a living manifestation of this. From Mason's perspective all things were possible and not only that, but he could tell you how to get it done. We will just have to muddle through without him.

There is an old Sufi aphorism that says, “When the heart weeps for what it has lost, the soul laughs for what it has found.”

“... there is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38)

Those are powerful words, and more far-reaching than we might credit. For we, all of us, are “of creation,” subject to all the triumphs and tragedies, the ups and downs, the joys and sorrows, the unexpected gains and losses of life. We can be amazingly resilient, and we can be tragically fragile. We know what it is to rejoice, and we know what it is to grieve. We know what it is to love a great love, and we know what it is to lose a great love.

There is much of life, of being “of creation,” that is beyond our ability to reason out and understand. A baby is born almost six weeks beyond his due date, and weighing over 10 pounds. He grows into a bright, vibrant, intense and creative child and young man. He writes for his college newspaper, The Battalion, no less, and breaking some molds there, if I might say so. He knows love in 7 years of marriage to Taylor, and loss, and the beginnings of love again with Brittany. He enjoys work and leisure, experiences growth and change, only to be separated from all who love him and from an unfulfilled future by a tragic, untimely death. Two parents lose one of their children, a large extended family loses one of its dear ones, and it’s beyond our understanding. I don’t mind telling you, I don’t like it, but there it is. We ask why, but there are no ready answers.

But I have to say that I don’t believe that what has happened was God’s “will” for Mason’s life. The God I worship does not “take” people from us too soon, but is there to receive us when life hands us a circumstance we cannot overcome, no matter how hard we try. And let me tell you, Mason tried hard.

It’s difficult to reconcile the tremendous, heartfelt outpouring of prayer for Mason’s recovery and the fact of his death. I have no wise words for us on that. But I do have wise words from someone else. Presbyterian minister and author Frederick Buechner writes the following about prayer:

“Keep on praying, Jesus says – not, one assumes because you have to beat a path to God’s door before God will open it, but because until you beat the path maybe there’s no way of getting to your door. . . .Keep on praying, keep on beating the path to God’s door, because the one thing you can be sure of is that down the path you beat with even your most half-cocked and halting prayer the God you call upon will finally come, and even if God does not bring you the answer you want, God will bring you God’s own Self. And maybe at the secret heart of all our prayers that is what we are really praying for.”

Scripture is not silent on either the joys or the pains of being “of creation.” This powerful affirmation that we have shared from Paul’s writing reflects the reality of God’s intention to be with us through whatever life, whatever being “of creation,” might bring us. Even

the untimely tragedy that draws us together today falls under this assurance of gracious presence, of loving “standing with.”

“There is nothing in all creation ...” The love God reveals to us, the love that lies at the heart of creation, stays with us, holds us up, and, eventually, brings us home.

Home for Mason on this day is the warm embrace of a God who loved and cared for him all through this life, even in those days that Mason did not know or acknowledge it. That same God now continues to love and care for Mason on the other side of death.

Home for Susan and Steve, for Crystal and James, for Tohner and Brandy and little Rowan on this day of loss and grief is the warm embrace of family and friends who, perhaps all unknowing, offer God’s warm embrace.

Home for the other communities of work and friendship in which Mason participated is in recognizing and celebrating the man who was Mason Jackson, his values, his engaging way, his openness to life and living, his inquisitive and incisive mind.

“There is nothing in all creation that can separate us from the love of God ...” It is because of that love, the love that refuses to let us go, that we gather here, in a place like this, on this day. That love is so strong, so enduring, so faithful, that there is nothing that can separate us from it. Nothing, not even being “of creation,” could separate Mason from that love. Nothing, not even the pain of grief and loss, can separate us from that love. Nothing, not even death, can finally defeat that love. Thanks be to God for this inexpressible gift!