

A Funeral Meditation  
A Service of Witness to the Resurrection  
John Knox Presbyterian Church - Indianapolis, Indiana  
March 14, 2015

George Hart  
December 21, 1927 – March 6, 2015

**Romans 8: 31-39**  
**John 14: 1-6, 25-27**

Grief; sadness; confusion; loss – these are some of the many emotions which we bring with us today. Grief for a dear friend no longer being with us. Sadness that new memories will not be made for the future. Confusion at how someone can be here one day, and not here the next. The loss of such an important person in all of our lives.

I can almost hear George saying, with that twinkle in his eye, “Frank, are you talking about me? Come on – let’s get moving.”

It is true, we are grieving the loss of a strong, vibrant man who touched us all in unique ways. And yet, today is not only about our grief, our need to seek comfort from God. It is also a time for us to give thanks to God for how he has worked through one of his children to teach us the breadth and depth of his love. For in our worship of witnessing to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we affirm that God is more powerful than death, and is the giver of eternal life.

The Apostle Paul is very direct and strong-willed when it comes to eternal life. That life is ruled by Jesus Christ. There are no shootings or violent acts against innocent human beings. There are no diseases or illnesses that cannot be cured. There is no hatred or abuse or famine. The life that Christ rules is one of peace and hope. It is a life that we have been promised in his life, death, and resurrection. It is a life that is unlike anything which we can know now, but will ultimately know if we only have an inkling of faith in him.

In his Letter to the Romans, Paul reassures us of this eternal hope by exhorting the church to believe in God’s boundless love for us. No matter what we may suffer through in this world, no one can separate us from God’s love in Jesus 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 him who loved us” (8:35,37). The trials and tribulations we may go through now are nothing in comparison to how God has loved us in his Son, Jesus Christ. That is the promise, the comfort, the assurance we have as Christians that life is indeed better because God first loved us. “(Nothing) in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:39).

One of the things I often say to someone when we part ways is, “I’ll see you soon.” I saw George the day that he died. Greg and I prayed with George, and even though I knew his time on earth was short, I still left him with, “I’ll see you soon.”

In saying that, perhaps I was speaking the faith that Jesus shares in the reading we have heard from John's Gospel. When Jesus spoke to his disciples, he knew they were worried, scared, and uncertain about what the future held if he was not going to be with them. To ease their anxiety, Jesus assures them there is a place waiting for them in his father's kingdom. "In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." That is a great assurance to me, and I hope it is for you, as well. For in our faith in the resurrection, life does not end with the diseases we suffer from, the pain we endure, or the heartbreak we experience. Instead, eternal life is promised by the one who is "the way and the truth and the life." It is because of that faith that I know I will see and you will see George and so many others very, very soon, as we will meet in the many dwelling places that our Lord has prepared for us.

What is the image that you will hold onto in your hearts and minds of George Hart? Is it of him having family and friends over to the house, cooking on the grill, he and Wanda sharing stories and laughter? Is it of him supervising students and staff at IUPUI for banquets and events? Is it of him singing in the choir, or singing "His Eye Is on the Sparrow," or playing the piano? Is it of him digging in the gardens at home or at the church, or participating in a Session or Deacons meeting here, or greeting you with that warm, welcoming smile? Is it of him caring for Wanda near the end of her life, or his grace and dignity as he lived with a progressive disease, or his love of speaking proudly of everything that his son, Greg, had achieved? Is it of him going to his favorite place to eat - Hooters? He always told me it was because of the barbecue ribs. Am I mistaken?!

We are all here today because God touched us deeply through the life of George Hart. We each will carry with us particular memories of how God enriched our life through George's life. Jesus speaks of a light that shines in us, that exists in each of us, and as Jesus says, is not to be hidden, but is to "shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Our presence here today is testimony to the fact that the light of Christ shone brightly through the life of George Hart. And that light touched so many people in so many different ways.

God showed us deep love and devotion to family and friends through George Hart. George and Wanda were married for 52 years, and through good times and challenging times, they never wavered in their commitment to one another. George and Wanda were blessed beyond belief when they brought Greg home as an infant, and he was always the center of their love and devotion as parents. And as we have heard from Carolyn, their love extended beyond blood lines - it was a love that welcomed in friends, neighbors, strangers, never judging others the way the world judges.

God showed us kindness and care through George Hart. Carolyn shared about George's propensity for writing notes to people, and perhaps you have been the recipient of one such note. They always seemed to come at just the right moment, lifting our spirit, giving us encouragement, causing us to laugh. In

the church office, we always loved receiving those cards from George, often at the holidays, but also at unexpected times. Three years ago, I was experiencing a good deal of stress and even burnout as the pastor of this church, and I had shared as much with the congregation in a meeting and a sermon one month. Soon afterwards, a card from George arrived addressed to me here at the church. It was short and sweet, as was usually the case with George's cards, but its message was powerful for me. It simply said, "Hear you are having a tough time right now. Keep your head up - you have a lot of people who love you and support you in this church." It was precisely what I needed to be told at that very hard time in my life, and I will miss dearly receiving those cards from one of the most caring men I have ever known.

God taught us gratitude and grace through George Hart. I only knew George once he was confined to his motorized wheelchair, the muscular disease having progressed to that point. If anyone had a reason to be angry with God or the world for this hand he had been dealt, it was George. And yet, not once did I hear him complain or be negative about his condition. Instead, he saw the good in what surrounded him and recognized God's blessings in what he had. He went out of his way to ask how you were doing, and he didn't let his "handicap" become an excuse for living to the fullest his life of discipleship.

He was most grateful for friendships and relationships that nurtured his life. Whether it was family, neighbors, people here at church, colleagues from work - George found joy and happiness in those times of togetherness. I was honored to be invited to celebrate George's birthday one year by going out to lunch with him, Greg, Jerry Carter, and Harlan Rolfson. No, it wasn't at Hooters - it has already closed over here on 38<sup>th</sup> Street. We went to Dawson's on Main in Speedway, and over sandwiches and drinks - George had a martini! - we talked, laughed, and enjoyed a meal together. And George soaked up every last minute of that experience. Perhaps we are reminded, through George's love of us, that God wants us to relish the time we spend with one another, for it is in those moments that we are face-to-face with the living, loving God.

We are each given a light which shines in us. That light can either be kept to ourselves, or shared with the world. There is no doubt what George chose to do with the light that God had given to him. Now, the question becomes: what will you do with the light God has shined on you through George? My prayer is that we may find it in ourselves to share that light of love. Because you never know how your light will illumine someone else's dark path, as surely George illumined each of our paths.

"The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore" (Psalm 121:8).

Thanks be to God. Amen.