

A Funeral Meditation
A Service of Witness to the Resurrection
Indianapolis, Indiana
September 16, 2019

Donald M. Charboneau
1938-2019

Romans 8: 31-39

Psalm 121

Acts 9: 36-42

Grief; sadness; anger; 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.

Right about now, Don is probably ready to say, “Frank, let’s move it along, now!”

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 which cannot be cured. There is no hatred or abuse or famine. The life which Christ rules is one of peace and hope. It is a life which we have been promised in his life, death, and resurrection. It is a life which 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).

As you will see at the top of your bulletin today, in the Presbyterian Church we call a funeral service “a service of witness to the resurrection.” We live our lives of faith as witnesses to the one who conquered death so that we all might have eternal life. Death may alter our earthly identity, but our faith in the resurrection grounds our being in the One who created us, who redeems us, and who sustains us.

In our gathering together here today, we are bearing witness. We are bearing witness to God’s grace and presence in the life of Don Charboneau, one of God’s children, who touched each of us and so many others in immeasurable ways. And we are also bearing witness to the fact that we trust and believe that God will be with us in all times of life: times of great joy and happiness, and times of great sadness and grief. Just as Don was never alone in his walk of faith throughout his life, neither are we alone as we bear witness to the one who is the way, the truth, and the life.

As I thought about how God shined his light through Don Charboneau, the first thought that came to my mind was that Don never met someone he couldn’t talk to. It might have been the greeter at the store, it might have been someone in his neighborhood, it might have been here on a Sunday at church – Don just loved to talk, share stories, and be with others. Now, I’ll admit that there were times when I’d see Don pull up in the drive outside my office, and I’d think, “Oh boy – this might be a while!” But even in those times, after we had visited and talked for however long it was, I felt better. I felt like I had connected with someone that appreciated and valued me. I believe that was one of Don’s spiritual gifts from God – making others feel welcome and included, no matter who they were or where they came from.

As we all know, Don loved to work with his hands. He loved fixing things that were broken. As a machinist at Allison’s for nearly thirty years, his mind was wired that way, and his attention to detail was exquisite – you just had to walk into his shop behind his house to see that. In later years, he and Harlan – or as I liked to call them Sanford and Sons – used their hands to take things apart, to scrap metal for recycling here at the church. I think for both of them, it was time to spend not just doing things with their hands, but also sharing in friendship and fellowship together – and we have been deeply grateful as a congregation for not only the fruits of their labor, but the example they gave to us of Christian love for one another.

When we talked last week about possible scriptures for the service that focused on Don’s handiwork, I thought of this passage from the Book of Acts. We read that “Dorcas or Tabitha (she was known by both names) was a disciple who was devoted to good works and acts of charity.” When she died, the church in Joppa sent for Peter and the

disciples to come and do something. Did you notice what they did when the disciples arrived? “All the widows stood beside Peter, weeping and showing tunics and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was with them.” Dorcas’ handiwork was their testimony to how she had impacted their lives of faith.

As I thought about it, Don’s handiwork will be with us for years to come as a witness of his life of faith. He took it upon himself several years ago to research, purchase, and install the window air conditioning units that are in all our classrooms along the outer-ring of the building. Why? Because he wanted to be sure the children – some of whom were his own grandchildren – would be comfortable in the spaces they would be learning and growing in the faith. I am sure that there are hundreds of examples with your family of how Don’s handiwork is evidence of his love and faithfulness. Through his hands and his heart, God cared for others through Don Charboneau.

Don’s handiwork is also an example of his deep generosity. The family was telling me on Thursday that you had to be careful around Don, because if you mentioned that it would be great to have some particular item, the next thing you knew Don would have bought it for you – and maybe much more of it that you needed! The holidays were some of Don’s favorite times of the year – Christmas and Easter especially. Apparently, it was not uncommon for the Christmas tree to be hidden at the Charboneau house because of all the gifts under and around it. I can only imagine with 13 children and 34 grandchildren! What brought Don joy was seeing others experience joy – and his generosity of heart and spirit was God’s way of lifting all of us when we were low.

But if you had to describe what was most important to Don Charboneau in life, it could be summarized in one word: family. Nothing was more important to Don than his family. He was a loyal, loving husband to Lois for sixty-one years. They met through mutual friends, and he proposed to Lois on the thirteenth of December. Coincidentally, they had thirteen children. As DeAnne said the other day, it’s probably a good thing that he didn’t propose to Lois on the 23rd of December!

He provided for his family in all that they needed – and modeled that example to his children and grandchildren. I officiated at a wedding on Saturday, and the father of the groom in his toast said that they were so pleased to welcome the bride into their family as one of their children. And that is how Don and Lois welcomed all their children’s and grandchildren’s spouses – as if they were their own family. What a beautiful example of God’s love which we all need to feel and experience, and we can share just as Don and Lois have shared in their lives of faith with their family.

That does not mean times were always rosy or easy. This family has lived through very trying times – the death of Darrin and Maria and Kyle. The pain is real, the grief is deep, the challenges have been hard at

times. But even in these difficult times, their mutual love has helped them through – just as it will sustain them in this time of grief and loss. God brought love and comfort and strength through the life of Don Charboneau.

Finally, it was no secret that Don had major health issues that had been diagnosed in the last several weeks. His heart was failing, and bypass surgery was a great risk. Nevertheless, it was a great shock to us all to receive the news that he had died one week ago today.

Yet even in his final days on this earth, Don did what he loved to do. He tinkered around in his shop. He came to church on Sunday with Lois, visiting and greeting people as he loved to do. He saw his granddaughter, Jillian, assist in leading worship. He held his great-grandson, Jeffrey, soaking in the admiration and love of all the church ladies! I have to believe that he was at peace. I am grateful for that gift God gave Don in his final hours on this earth.

The story of Tabitha does not end with the widows showing Peter her hand-made tunics and clothing. It ends with resurrection hope. “Peter knelt down and prayed. He turned to the body and said, ‘Tabitha, get up.’ Then she opened her eyes, and seeing Peter, she sat up. Then calling all the saints and widows, he showed her to be alive.”

Don has been raised up this day to live with the saints who have gone before him. We give thanks to God for the resurrection hope we have in Jesus Christ our Lord. May we be witnesses every day to that hope, so others might believe as Don believed, that all will one day be greeted and welcomed into God’s eternal kingdom.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.