

An Old Question and Christian Hope

A Service of Worship in Celebration of the Life of

Harry F. “Bud” Wynne-Parry,

December 16, 1924 – January 5, 2015

Richard A. Rhem

VanZantwick Bartels Kammeraad Funeral Home

Grand Haven, Michigan

January 10, 2015

A few weeks ago I was invited to lead a discussion in one of Grand Rapids’ historic churches – Park Congregational – on the subject of heaven. I was to be the third of three speakers, the first two dealing with books on near-death experiences. When I read what they had advertised as my subject, I was somewhat taken aback. I was announced thus:

Rev. Richard A. Rhem will facilitate a discussion on faith, life, heaven, and the human experience. We will talk about classical interpretations of scripture, the progressive perspective, and whatever else comes to mind.

Who could fulfill such an assignment – “faith, life, heaven and the human experience”!

While I certainly was not up to such an assignment, I realized how much the human family wonders about human being, meaning, destiny. We rush through life, our lives busy with so many obligations, responsibilities, distractions and then at times we are stopped in our tracks and questions of ultimate concern press themselves upon us. We wonder, we question, we long for some light to illumine our lives and answer our questions.

Jeanne, when I called to inquire of Bud and determine when I might see him, he was nearing his end. Faithfully you watched and waited, cared and wondered. We set a time. But before that time arrived, he had breathed his last. You called to tell me and then after a pause, you said, “Dick, did he know? Is he okay”? Your voice was quiet; you were so intense. I was moved by your loving, caring, wondering question. Having just dealt with precisely your question so recently I realized anew that finally with those we love, indeed, for ourselves, we want to know everything is okay.

It is an old question, maybe the oldest since the dawn of human consciousness, awareness, awareness of the other:

Is this all there is?

Is there more beyond death’s pale?

We find this wondering in the ancient Hebrew poet, the author of Ecclesiastes, in the familiar third chapter.

A time we are born and a time we die. ...God has made everything beautiful in its own time and has put an eternal yearning in our hearts even as we live before the face of Mystery.

The poet was skeptical about so much. I often wonder how his work got into the canon of Scripture. But he wondered and realized there was a sense of something more that, even in all his skepticism and agnosticism, he could not finally deny.

That something more is strongly pointed to in the New Testament. St. Paul's Hymn of Love, I Corinthians 13, points to that something more; he writes of the "now" and the "then," acknowledging that now we wonder with a lack of clarity but he has no doubt that the clouds will part and shadows disappear "then."

For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.

And his major point is, of course, that Love is the greatest gift in human experience and Love abides – Love now with questions, Love finally revealing life's mystery beyond death. That is our Christian hope.

And so, when asked about life's great mysteries and what lies beyond, I realize I have no carefully delineated answers. I have a fundamental trust that beyond the pale Love is, and thus light is and peace, and I trust

All will be well. All will be well.
All manner of things will be well.

And those we've loved and lost awhile are finally home in Light Eternal. Let not our hearts be troubled.

Let us be in the spirit of prayer
in the presence of the Creative Source of all being,
in whom we live and move and have our being –
the Sacred Mystery hidden in a cloud of unknowing.

Eternal God, Source, Guide and Goal of all that is,
from You we receive life as a gift
and to You our life returns.
In the Psalmist's poetic expression,
*You send forth your breath, your Spirit,
and they are created.
You take away their breath,
they die.*

We find our comfort in life and in death
that we are not our own
but belong to You,
a faithful God whose steadfast love embraces us
on this fascinating and fragile human pilgrimage.
And thus we find it most natural
at such a time as this, in such a place as this,
to lift up our hearts in worship,
to bow in Your presence before the mystery of life
and the reality of death.

We worship
for we are aware
of the wonder of creation,
its beauty and its terror, its loveliness and its pain.
We turn to You, O God;
we rest in You; we trust where we do not know.
In You we hope, and to You we commend
those we've loved and lost awhile.

Good and Gracious God,
You breathe into us
and we have the gift of life;
we commend our breath to You,
and thus our earthly pilgrimage is ended.
You, O God, are the source and giver of life,
and to You all life returns.

In the beginning, in the end,
You are God.
And in the meantime, this in-between time,
You uphold us with everlasting arms.
You overshadow us with a gracious Presence.
You bear us up on eagle's wings;
beneath your sheltering wings we find refuge and peace.

Sacred Mystery of all being, of our being,
consciously aware of our lives in your light,
we worship.

We know that all will be well,
all will be well,
all manner of things will be well.

That was the trust of the one
whose life we remember and celebrate today.
Images tumble through our minds of the way he was –
so alive, so sharp, so outgoing,

a beacon of light, a bearer of joy.
Loving husband, cared for so faithfully by his Jeanne,
caring and conscientious father,
friend of many,
full of fun and constant in conversation,
generous, meticulous, and organized to the T.

And thus, O God, we celebrate Your grace in his life
and remember him with affection and respect.
Knowing he was resting on everlasting arms
in the embrace of Grace,
he was unafraid, knowing he was rested
in God's eternal love.

And in such a time as this, in such a place as this,
Gracious God, we are grateful above all
that the end is not broken health and dreams unfulfilled,
swallowed up in death,
but rather the confidence that
to live is to live unto the Lord,
and to die is to die unto the Lord,
so then whether we live or die,
we are the Lord's.

Receive our thanksgiving, O God.
Grant the comfort of Your Spirit,
renew our hope and lead us on
in the confidence that nothing can ever separate us
from Your love in Christ Jesus our Lord,
who taught us to pray, saying,

*Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy kingdom come,
Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.
Amen.*