

Jesse Perkins
Friday, December 8, 2023
Joe Ridges Funeral Sermon

1 Corinthians 15: 20-26, 35-38, 42-44, 53-58
Psalm 90
John 14:1-6

In the name of the God who creates us,
who loves us,
and who welcomes us home. Amen.

- Thank you all for being here, thank you all for surrounding this family with your love and support
 - Vicki, I know that planning this service has been a journey- starting out with just three of us
 - And now expanding to include others, and I hope you see that as a symbol of just how much we all care about you
 - As well as our desire to honor Joe and help commend him to almighty God, as he goes from life to life, strength to strength
 - Joe was a complex man to say the least
 - He was a man of deep faith, but also one who really struggled with the church as it changed and evolved over the last few decades
 - I remember very clearly sitting with Joe in his living room just a week or two before he died, making preparations
 - He asked me if there was way I could use the 1928 Book of Common Prayer for this service...
 - I appreciated where he was coming from, I appreciate how meaningful those prayers and those holy words were to him and many others really
 - But I told him I was not authorized to do that.
 - But you know, I get it, I do, if they ever create a new one and replace this one, I'll likely feel the same way as Joe
 - You will notice that today's service and booklet are very different than what we usually do here at St. Michael's
 - I went and looked it up, and with every opportunity I had, I shaped this service to be as close to what Joe would have wanted as possible
 - The Readings, the Psalm, some of the prayers...

- Right down to our use of the actual books instead of a printed booklets
 - Cause that is how we did it before the new book, and the availability of copy machines
- Joe was not raised religious, but found God in an Episcopal church, while praying and hearing these words that he held so dear
- They are powerful words, liturgy is powerful, Joe knew that
- Joe was an Eagle scout, he was in the coast guard, he was a high school activities bus driver- and there he really made an impact
- He and Vicki were married for 55 years!
- They first found St. Micheal's in the yellow pages, and upon their first visit he was recruited to help put up tables and chairs
- Vicki tells me he was hooked- he had found his next faith home here at St. Michael's, a place where he could serve
- Joe has been sober since 1989: I say that because I know that this had a major impact on his life, before and after it
- And I admire this a lot, I have seen what addiction can do to a person and family
- And Joe through his persistence and commitment.... and stubbornness, became and stayed sober- that is not easy to do
- He refused to drink alcohol even when he knew he would be dying within the next couple of weeks-
 - he told me he would not throw that achievement away
- Joe and I talked deeply before he died about how, while attending the funeral service for Art Kinney, he had a warming of the heart
- He felt that a couple of damaged relationships had healed a bit, he felt God in that service, and he knew it would be his time soon
- Like I said, Joe was complex, and that same strength and stubbornness was sometimes his downfall
- He was not perfect, he made his mistakes, he had a temper
- And today I want us to remember the entire man who was A. Joesph Ridges
 - To say thanks, and to make our peace
 - It is also our task this afternoon to see with the eyes of faith
 - To lean into trust that God meant what God said, and that there is more to life than just these 86 years
- It is at times like this that we get an opportunity to really get down deep into our faith and what we believe in, or trust in, as Christians
 - We get to cut through a lot of fluff in a funeral

- We get to talk about a part of our truest identity as members of God's family, children of God
- In fact, if I were to try and sum up that faith- or at least a lot of it- I think we might could start here
- God created the universe, our world, and us- you, me, and Joe, created it all out of love
- God's love for us and for creation runs so deep, is so strong, that it is even unstoppable
- And not even death can hold it back- not even death can come between us and God because of God's love
 - Paul tells us that
- And out of that deep, unstoppable love for us comes the gift of eternal life that is beyond what you and I see standing here today.
- And that same God who has been there, and loved us while we are full of life,
- Is still standing there when we die... ready to welcome us on the other side
- Where we will dwell in God's house for ever- not just go there, but dwell there
 - Be at home there, breathe peacefully, take off our shoes- dwell in the house of the Lord
- Because that is the nature of God's love- it is too strong and too deep to even let this get in the way
- I believe this, I trust this, because that is what divine love would do- must do
 - For Joe, and for us.
- I had a very old mental image come to mind this week as I was preparing for this service
 - It is one of those detached memories, right, where you see it but cannot remember where you first encountered it, or the original context
 - But I have spent some time with this image of our transition from this life to the next and I want to share it with you
 - Our liturgy reminds us that death is but a transition from one life to another in God
 - And I remember reading someone who pictured it like this: we die, and we are raised in glory, and brought up to dwell with and in the divine

- And during that process as we move from this world to the next, we are transformed, our essence is on fire, like a shooting star through the night sky
- And that holy fire, it's not painful or destructive, but it is burning off all of the sin, the baggage, the mistakes and the muck that we collect over our lives
- It is burning all of that away and revealing and liberating the true and pure soul underneath that God created,
 - and that God is welcoming back home
- All of our pain, the hurt, the suffering, things done to us and by us,
 - As we begin to see God's presence face to face, it burns all of that away and we are purified and returned to holy innocence
- I hope that happens, for me for Joe and for all of us.
- And we get that new body our reading describes today, because the old has been burned away, discarded, left behind
- It is this reason that this service is finally one of celebration in the eyes of the church
- We do not wear black today- we wear white vestments: Easter white.
- We say alleluia's, not ignoring the loss or the grief that comes in death, but defiantly believing that it does not have the last word
- We are transformed, the old self left behind and burned away, and a new body given
- So my prayers are with you today, and I ask God to bring you comfort, healing, and forgiveness
 - I ask God's Holy Spirit, the Comforter, to be with you in the grieving, the celebrating, and the healing
 - Laugh and cry when you need to,
 - forgive and heal when you need to
 - And love each other
 - And as we leave here, let our prayer be as another one of those old 1928 prayers say:
 - MOST merciful Father, who hast been pleased to take unto thyself the soul of this thy servant Joe; Grant to us who are still in our pilgrimage, and who walk as yet by faith, that having served thee with constancy on earth, we may be joined hereafter with thy blessed saints in glory everlasting; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.