

Funeral Meditation—November 3, 2006—Bob Young

How can you sum up a person's life in words? The fact is you can't, even if you fill up more pages than *War and Peace*. And you can multiply that tenfold in the case of someone like Bob who, in the course of his 8 decades accomplished so much and had an impact on so many people. However, what is far more important than the degrees or the honors he earned and the titles held, impressive as they are, are these words of Scripture that speak of the witness of his life: "Have you considered my servant, Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil?" and from Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith...."

Now, I can hear Bob saying, "Preacher, don't get carried away," for our friend was never one to put himself on a pedestal. He would readily admit to imperfection—something we all share in every respect. Nonetheless, his life spoke for itself, and the truth is that nothing I say can add to that.

Some other words of Scripture also came to mind as I prepared for this service: "Now faith, hope, and love abide, but the greatest of these is love." You usually hear that passage at weddings, and by the time he had finished the race Bob knew it well. Yet, while 1 Cor. 13 is "right and meet" for such occasions as the King James might put it, it speaks not just to days of matrimonial joy but to all of our life in Christ—for those three virtues lie at the heart of following him whom we call Lord and Savior.

Although Bob was very much a man of science, his faith burned bright and true, and he set an example for all those who struggle reconcile the two. As a good Presbyterian, he knew that God is the source of all truth, and therefore you need not be afraid to pursue truth wherever it may lead. Our friend applied that principle in all areas of life, as you quickly learned if you sat in on a Sunday School class he taught. There were no sacred cows for Bob, and I'm sure he's having quite a discussion up in heaven even as we sit here this morning.

And yet for all his questions, he was a man of deep faith, the same faith that brings us here today, the faith that assures us that death is not the end, but the doorway to a life more wondrous and fair than anything we can dream of. Bob understood that faith

is not matter of blank belief, but one that allows for honest struggle with difficult issues. But our faith also promises that one day those struggles will be no more, and today we rejoice that, unlike us, he no longer sees as in a mirror dimly, but now knows fully, even as he is known by God.

As for hope and love, what better embodiment of those qualities could you find than in Doctor Young? Despite losing four wives, he never gave up hope and he never gave up on love. Most of us men are lucky if we find one woman who will put up with us, but Bob beat those odds by a factor of five. He knew the pain of losing someone he loved dearly, but he refused to let grief have the last word. Again, what a wonderful example he set for us. We rightly grieve today as we say goodbye and pay our final respects to this fine man. To say we will miss him, only scratches the surface of what we feel.

Yet the hope of our faith assures us that as the Psalmist wrote, “Tears may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” That is God’s promise to us, and certainly one that Bob claimed for himself. Even amid our tears, we hold fast to that promise, and we know that even in the face of death of those we love, God’s will for us is one of life, abundant and good. I remember one of the last times I spoke with Bob, I mentioned that I was getting ready to go on a college tour with Terri and Josh, and he said that whatever happened, that I should go ahead with my plans. He knew that life was for the living, and he did just that right till the end.

But our hope given to us in Christ Jesus, offers far more than strength in times of sorrow and joy for our tomorrows, as much as we need them; it points past this world where eventually everything fades and turns to dust to the place where all that is good and true and beautiful will be made complete in the fullness of God’s time, time that has nothing to do with our attempts to determine how or when. Such hope cannot be proven, only lived in trust as Frederick Buechner reminds us in an essay called, “All’s Lost, All’s Found.”

“In the past,” he writes, “when my faith was strong, I always trusted God more or less. I trusted him with my life, which is to say, I trusted him, but the supposition was that I would always in some measure be alive to say to him the words of the ‘Te Deum,’ ‘O Lord, in Thee have I trusted...let me never be confounded,’ meaning that I would

always be around to cajole with him, plead with him, and in general to remind him to be the God of mercy and love I always trusted him to be. The change is that now I begin at least, to trust him with my death. I begin, at least, to see that death is not merely a biological necessity, but a necessity, too, in terms of the mystery of salvation. We find by losing. We hold fast by letting go. We become something new by ceasing to be something old. This seems to be close to the heart of that mystery.”

Then Buechner concludes, “I know no more than I ever did about the far side of death as the last letting go of all, but I begin to know that I do not need to know, and that I do not need to be afraid of not knowing. God knows. That is all that matters.”

Yes, God knows, and while cannot see past the far side of death, we do know that God is love, and that as Paul says, “Love never ends,”—neither God’s love nor ours. So it is that the love Bob shared with his family and friends and students has not been diminished by his passing, for it lives on as we share it with those in our own lives. Beyond that, our faith and our hope assure us that God’s love has now been perfected in the life and death of our friend, whose life and death has brought us together this morning.

We cannot know the specifics of just what that means, but we don’t have to. We need only look to the One who overcame the grave and burst the bonds of sin and death, and listen to his promises “Because I live, you shall live also. Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last. I will come again and take you to myself, so that where I am, you may be also.”

Standing in the light of the resurrection, we don’t have to worry about what happens when we die—God knows, and truly, that is all that matters. Instead, we can focus on the time we have been given, even as Bob did, and be willing to take the risks that come with love, for it is only in love that we honor our brothers and sisters in Christ who are now part of the Church triumphant, and only in love can we begin to experience the gift of eternal life even now—the gift that is Bob’s forevermore.

“Now, faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”  
Amen.