

Requiem Service for Wayne

In the name of the Divine Mystery, who made us, who loves us, and who travels the way with us.

“We had hoped...” Yes, like those two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we had hoped. Like those two disciples, since hearing and talking about all these things that had happened, we, too, have stood still, looking sad. We gathered in this church only two weeks ago to pray for healing for our brothers Wayne and Harry. “We had hoped...” Harry and Nikki, with you we had hoped.

And yet here we are. Like those two disciples, we find ourselves downcast. You can almost hear those two, in the story they tell, including the heartfelt words that linger in our own hearts, “and it isn’t fair.” But this Emmaus story offers us a lesson in grief. When the stranger asks them what they’ve been talking about, he gives them a chance to tell their story – and that is part of the reason we gather in community when we are grieving... it is part of the gift we give to one another, a chance to tell our story. But the Stranger gives them another gift – of seeing what has happened in the context of their faith. We are told, “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.” Jesus was not holding a Bible study or giving a complicated exegesis. No, Jesus was doing there what he did with his life: revealing God to them and to us. The stranger asked them to remember what they knew of this one they had lost - and helped them see and remember what they knew and believed about God.

When they invite this stranger to stay with them, to break bread with them, they come to recognize that the One they loved and thought lost was not really gone from them at all. “Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight.”

Wayne *has* vanished from our sight. But we recognize him *here*. Our hearts burn with recognition of this man who put his life in the hand of the potter and was willing to be remade, over and over again, into a vessel that served so many. “Then the word of the Lord came to me: Can I not do with you, O house of Israel, just as this potter has done?” Wayne heard those words and believed them. And his life remade, gave witness to others “that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion.”

As one dear friend of Wayne’s wrote, “Wayne’s call to priesthood, which he lived joyfully and deeply, could not have been anticipated by earlier journeys in his life that beckoned toward self-destruction and despair. The movement to sobriety of any kind is not an easy road and Wayne made that journey, and helped others walk that same pathway.”

And there is the story of Wayne in a nutshell, perhaps. He walked the *talk*, this man. He literally walked the journey when he made the pilgrimage on the Migrant Trail a few years ago. He was not content only to speak of our call to accompany our brothers and sisters, to work for the dignity of every person. He went to *be* with people, where they were. He walked the talk when he spoke at demonstrations here in Mt. Pleasant. He had a knack for *preaching* about social justice, but he had a passion for trying to *live* it.

The Emmaus story is so poignant for us today, perhaps, because it allows us to see *Wayne* as the stranger who accompanied so many of us on our journeys, who listened to our stories, who shared his own, who broke bread with us – the bread of Eucharist, and the bread of his life. And our hearts burn within us, because a part of us recognizes very well that God found a dwelling place in Wayne, that God accompanied us through Wayne.

And I do not think it is heretical to see Wayne in that Stranger accompanying the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Each of us, we say, is made in the image and likeness of God. We profess that in baptism we are united with Christ. We claim to be God's children. But we hesitate at acknowledging that we can indeed find God present in one another. Well, let us not hesitate here. Now is the day and time and place for us to be able to claim what our hearts tell us – not that Wayne was perfect or the full embodiment of the Christ, but that we found in him one who was willing to travel the way with us, one who would help us remember what we believe and know about this God who is mystery beyond our knowing, but who indeed made us and remakes us– like the potter – and who certainly and surely loves us unconditionally.

What drew us to Wayne – what draws us here – is that Wayne allowed God to express Godself in him. By the way he lived his life, Wayne shared what he had come to know of God. That God welcomes EVERYONE – and welcomes them in ways they can hear... so he just made cookies with some students and opened this church for recitals for others, worked to make medical care available to the poor in the community, and made space for the homeless within these walls of St. John's. He even welcomed two Catholic nuns - and you can see what happened there.

He knew a God who was present in all things – and so Wayne celebrated that presence in beautiful music, and in good food. With care he wove the strands of life into beautiful cloth. He loved drama and extravagant chanting. I doubt that we will ever hear again that Mozarabic chant that he sang on high feasts here, but he used it to ace one of his final exams in seminary, he told me, and he loved it. He loved the bells and smells of high liturgy – because he knew God was both intimate companion – *and* Mystery beyond our knowing. And he celebrated both.

No, I do not think it is heretical to see Wayne in that Stranger accompanying the disciples on the road to Emmaus – any more than it is to hear Wayne’s voice in the reading from Philippians: “I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now.” Each of us, each of you here, was in some way a cause of joy in Wayne’s life. We each became a part of the gospel – the Good News – of Wayne’s life. And I can hear Wayne speaking those words of Paul: “It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God’s grace with me...”

Yes, we hold Wayne in our hearts. But let us not keep him bound there. As Jesus said when he called Lazarus forth from the tomb, “Untie him, and let him go free.” Tell the stories, share the gospel, the *good news* that you found in him. Recognize that this Stranger that walked among us and with us was bearing the image of the Risen Christ – as we are all called to do. And let us recognize Christ and all the communion of saints, especially our brother Wayne, present with us in the breaking of the bread this day. Amen.