

Celebration of Life of Frank Smith, Sept 15, 2023

I offer my sympathy to you:

Dabney

Anita

Merritt

Hop and Meadow

Ivey, Emma, Ellie, Holly and Alex

Kristen Christopher

Steve and Judy

We meet this morning to honor Frank and we meet to mourn, both with Frank's family and acknowledging our own loss of this man who loved so well. Today, as the author of Ecclesiastes wrote all those centuries ago, we **weep and we laugh, we mourn and we dance (that is, our hearts are filled with joy)**. I have heard it said that one aspect of maturity is the ability to be able to hold seemingly opposing ideas at the same time. **I am a sinner. I (and you) are loved by God beyond any reckoning**. Yes, today is a day when our emotions will be pulled in opposite directions.

On behalf of Frank's family, I want to thank each of you who are here this morning. Some of us are present in this sacred space; some of us are watching from afar. As we seek to console Frank's family, we may say "I am so sorry..." Those words are full of healing; they are good and they are holy. But truly, we have no words past that. **And yet**, your presence here today speaks volumes. A look into one another's eyes, a touch on the arm, a gentle embrace speak in ways that words cannot. Your willingness to be present at this time is a blessing to Anita and the family. Again, I say thank you.

I remember visiting Frank and Anita in the hospital last autumn. I was a very new member of the community of St. Cyprian's, so I only knew them both on a surface level. I was making a pastoral visit, seeking to support them both. I **may** have accomplished that but what I left that hospital room with was the sense of being loved. Frank wanted to know about me, my call to ministry, a bit about what gave me joy. In turn, Frank and Anita shared some of their own stories. As I look back, I realize that each of us was willing to be vulnerable. And Frank was the one who made that possible.

As I read Frank's obituary on the back of the bulletin, I was amazed at the arc and path of his career. The people who were his work associates as well as the people who were his friends. Frank had an extraordinary career. Here's the thing: I never heard about any of this from Frank. Frank's humility was genuine.

Frank volunteered in the community. He went to the VA assisted living facility until the Covid pandemic made that no longer possible. Can you imagine how absolutely uplifting a visit from Frank was for those veterans! He also volunteered at the Main Library. My wife Leila was there not all that long ago when she ran into Frank, finding out for the first time that he volunteered

there. Frank offered to help her. Leila said she was looking for some light reading for vacation. Frank's face lit up as he told her he had the perfect book. He reached down and handed her...**War and Peace!**

When Jesus died on the cross, he overthrew death and the forces of evil. Yet, sometimes, it feels as though those forces of evil have free reign. The world will be fully restored, creation will sing, when God, in the fullness of time, has decided. In the meantime – and that's the time we are living in, the meantime – God invites us to work towards the restoration of the world. This life's work of Frank will echo throughout eternity. Beyond that, our faith assures us that Frank is with Jesus. Jesus himself gives us that assurance. **All that the Father gives to me will come to me, and him who comes to me I will not cast out.** We can be assured that Frank is with Jesus, perhaps showing him one of his whimsical ties!

Those of us who know Frank – and I say know because our faith tells us that although changed, Frank lives – we know that his body was getting frail. As one who either serves the chalice or the paten, I am privileged and blessed to see people's faces as they receive communion. There was always a smile and a deep joy with Frank as we shared this holy moment. I am reminded of a verse from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. **So we're not giving up. How could we! Even though on the outside it often looks like things are falling apart on us, on the inside, where God is making new life, not a day goes by without God's unfolding grace.** Frank's smile and the light in his eyes were a window into God making a new life in Frank.

When Frank was but four years old, his father died. The little family was living in Birmingham and it was the mid 1930's. Frank's mother, Mary, moved with Frank to her parents' home in Suwanee, Tennessee. From all I know, both his grandparents' home and Suwanee itself became a safe haven for Frank. I daresay that for Frank, it was a thin place. If you have not heard that term before, allow me to explain. There are some places on earth where it feels as though the boundary between heaven and earth is very thin. A place where you feel as though you can almost touch heaven. Small wonder then, that Frank's earthly remains will be placed in Suwanee.

I am going to close with a poem by Wendell Berry. Several months ago, I read this poem to the congregation. Frank emailed me to tell me how much he appreciated the poem. Although the circumstances were entirely different, Wendell Berry returned from New York to a rural setting, a family farm. I believe the boy who moved to Tennessee and the man who moved to Kentucky have some mystical connection. Though I have no right to do so, I choose to make this poem Frank's parting words to us. This man who has no enemies perhaps heard good words for the rest of us.

The poem is from the Berry collection Sabbaths 1979. Since it is a sabbath, Berry writes of his tasks lying asleep like cattle. Even more than Sabbath rest, this poem is about encountering "the other" in our lives, one who is different from us and how this encounter might unfold.

Sabbaths 1979

By Wendell Berry

1

I go among trees and sit still.
All my stirring becomes quiet
around me like circles on water.
My tasks lie in their places
where I left them, asleep like cattle.

Then what is afraid of me comes
and lives a while in my sight.
What it fears in me leaves me,
and the fear of me leaves it.
It sings, and I hear its song.

Then what I am afraid of comes.
I live for a while in its sight.
What I fear in it leaves it,
and the fear of it leaves me.
It sings, and I hear its song.

After days of labor,
mute in my consternations,
I hear my song at last,
and I sing it. As we sing,
the day turns, the trees move.