

EULOGY FOR MY FATHER, MARCH 17, 2018

One of my life's best gifts has been my father. I can't tell you everything he meant, but I will share three stories which show some of what I learned from him.

One my favorite memories of my father begins oddly with a humungous horrible family fight. My siblings and I were born within four and half years of each other, and this occurred when we all adolescents. This particular argument involved all five members of the family, and by the time we come to a sort of shaky peace, it was 11:30 pm on a school night – way past bedtime. My wise parents knew if we went to bed then, we'd lie there rehearsing the fight and wake up angry. So my dear father piled his three adolescents into a car and we hunted for a grocery store that would still be open at that hour. He let us buy any ice cream or topping we wanted, and brought it all back, and the five of us had a glorious ice cream social at midnight on a school night. By the end, we were really at peace with each other, and it remains one of my happiest memories. LOVE IS HEALING.

Second story. I was planning my wedding, and trying on my mother's wedding dress. It was ivory satin, with a very form-fitting bodice, an enormous spread skirt and a long train. As part of the form-fitting part, one wore an undergarment which was, shall we say, very uplifting. As my mother and I admired the effect we got the giggles and we starting singing a variation on a praise song you may know: "For SHE is high and lifted up, and HER train fills the temple". As we're singing this at the top of our lungs, Dad walked in and got this expression of happy wonder on his face and said "I really like that image of God as a woman". I had a father who always celebrated my womanhood as part of the divine image in which humanity was created, and was always open to new ideas. It was intellectually and spiritually liberating. LOVE IS FREEING.

Last story. Five years ago my parents attended the 50th annual conference of the American Association of Pastoral Counsellors in St. Louis, Missouri; my father had also attended the very first conference, in 1963. Unfortunately, he fell and broke his hip. Dad was taken by ambulance to a busy trauma hospital, where he had to wait a day and a half for the needed surgery. I had the freest schedule, so I flew out and stayed with my mom in St. Louis for two and half weeks.

The surgery went well, but Dad had a bad reaction to the anesthesia and was in delirium for some days after the surgery. This meant he was moved out of his nice private room and into the dementia ward, a hot crowded room with five weak demented patients, some of them dying, and a medical attendant permanently seated there. It wasn't easy for mom and me to squeeze our chairs next to his bed.

We had a terrible time trying to comfort my father. He always knew who we were, but he didn't know where he was or what was happening to him. He had had a nightmare about being tortured in prison, and thought that the people who had tortured him were still watching from the corners of the ceiling. He was also frantically convinced that he had to get up to prepare his Easter sermon. Mom and I were reassured that he knew that Easter was the next day, but we had to

keep telling him to stay in bed, that his only job was to get well, that he did not have to prepare a sermon. It was hard to leave that night, but we needed to sleep.

The next day, Easter morning, Mom and I arrived at 8 am hoping to be in time to meet the doctor (the residents did the rounds early). We arrived just as the young resident was leaving the room - with a smile on his face, which I can assure you was very rare for anyone leaving that room. He told us he could hardly keep from laughing because when he arrived, Dad was preaching in delirium, delivering an Easter message about how God made and loves us all, and how we need to love each other in spite of racial and other differences, and how the resurrection was about hope; and all around the room, the other dementia patients were nodding and crossing themselves. The doctor just thought it was funny, crazy old man preaching to other crazy old people, though underneath you could tell he wished there were something in it.

For us, this was not a joke, but the work of the Holy Spirit. Dementia is a kind of prison, and my father's preaching, in his prison, had brought hope to other souls in prison. Neither he nor his fellow patients could attend church – most couldn't even walk - but through my father's preaching, they all had an experience of hope on Easter. Even at the lowest point of his life, God was working through my father.

For I believe, as my father believed, that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation [NOT EVEN DEMENTIA], will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."
LOVE IS FOREVER