

Requiescat in Pace – William Henry Umland III

Joshua 1:1-9

Ephesians 6:10-17

John 14:1-6

Bill was, more than most, familiar with death. As a mortal man, as a warrior, and as a Christian Bill had a keen awareness of death, an abiding respect for it, but death did not rule him. There's a reason for that. A funeral sermon is a story and, to be sure, there is a story to tell today. It is a story of courage and fear. Bill's life was so much more than just this simple dialectic, courage and fear. He was a romantic, a philosopher, a driven and successful business man, a loving and proud father, a musical aficionado, an adventurer, and a politically opinionated patriot. His good humor lightened the room. His fashion sense and grooming abilities elevated his peers. His intelligence and work ethic served the common good and put bread on his family's table. But from where I sit, the dichotomy of courage and fear is the best way to come at Bill's story.

Courage is certainly not just a masculine trait, but it is one to which most men aspire. From the time we were little boys, we've been taught about courage, taught to strive to be courageous. About courage, Mark Twain said this: "Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear, not absence of fear." John Wayne, the quintessential figure of manliness for a passing generation said this: "Courage is being scared to death but saddling up anyway." Courage comes within a context, in a setting. A threat looms nearby any expression of courage. The more severe the threat the more opportunity for a courageous response. I don't make the rules, I just try to explain them, kind of like Forest Gump's mother.

In 1970, Bill walked through the valley of the shadow of death. His Huey helicopter had been shot down in Cambodia and Bill found himself behind enemy lines with a fractured lower leg. Fear was not an abstraction for our beloved brother that day, nor was death a distant phantom that one could look at with a sense of whimsical detachment. Bill had to act. He spoke of this event exceedingly rarely, out of a genuine sense of modesty and gentlemanly decorum, and I am using the broadest but the most accurate brushstrokes. Like you, I can't imagine the personal fortitude, the resourcefulness and the focus that it took to navigate through the perilous jungle to a place of safety.

Be strong and courageous. God spoke to Joshua without caveat. Be strong and courageous. Unlike today's sound bites, unlike a marketing campaign slogan that has nothing beneath it but vanishing vapor, God's Words are based on something substantial. Be strong and courageous. "Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5). Just as God breathed into man the breath of life God breathed into Joshua strength and courage; to meet the challenges that he would face, to lead God's people Israel into the Promised Land, to have the ability to overcome fear and dismay – God breathed into Joshua strength and courage. I am with you. That is the ground upon which strength and courage stands. That is the ground upon which Bill's life was built. Bill knew, if God is for me, who can be against me?

This has been a year of fear. To some unknown degree, Christ's church has forgotten what the Incarnation means and fear has taken on outsized proportion. God was made man and made His dwelling among us – that's what the Incarnation means. Immanuel, He is called. Immanuel; it

means “God with us.” Into this jungle of peril, the Lord of heaven and earth ventured to meet the enemy that scowls at us all. True God and true Man, Jesus ventures from His birth at Bethlehem to His cross in Jerusalem. Along the way, the Son of God encountered threats of every variety. It was not His divine omnipotence that He came to display. He laid aside His divine prerogatives and took up the form of a servant. In remarkable humility, in remarkable love, the Son of God came to lay down His life. He contends for us by allowing death to ravage Him. He contends for us by allowing sin to hold Him down so that spikes could be driven through His hands and His feet. Christ on the cross – that is “God *for you.*”

On one occasion, when the people of Israel were pinned up against the Red Sea with Pharaoh, the King of Egypt, bearing down on them with his chariots and his horsemen, the Israelites whimpered, crying out to Moses, cursing him for what they believed to be their coming death. What Moses said in reply serves us well to hear today: “Fear not, stand firm, and see the salvation of the Lord which he will work for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you, you have only to be still” (Exodus 14:13-14). For a Christian, courage comes from what God has done, not from what we are called to do. At Mt. Calvary, the Lord Christ fought for us. He was for us – taking our sin, our disease, and our death. He fought for us, by laying down His life. Christ crucified is the salvation which God has worked for us today and every day.

Bill grew up in Brooklyn. Whip smart, parents and school administrators thought that it would be a good idea for Bill to skip a couple of grades. That compliment had its problematic side. Bill was the undersized German kid with glasses who regularly got beat up by the bigger Italian boys. It likely toughened him up. It also likely taught him that he needed armor in this life. Not Kevlar but something more durable, more useful against real foes. I would suggest to you that Bill knew who defended him, who provided him with the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth, and the shield of faith. This life has more powerful antagonists than Italian bullies. The devil and his minions never cease to sow seeds of doubt, seeds of religious cowardice and seeds of perpetual fear. Bill was well-armed and he knew it. God was for him and he knew it. The Lord Christ was with him and he knew it. There were battles that Bill could not fight... and he knew that as well.

Bill was, more than most, familiar with death. It wasn't his death that he was most familiar with; it was Christ's. Easter lives large in the heart of a believer. “O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?” It is liberating to know that you don't have to fight. It is liberating to know that the tomb has been broken, that death lies shattered on the floor, that your sins are forgiven by a loving God and that we are saved by grace, a free gift. Bill was liberated. From a lot of the things that assault the mind of man and hurt the soul, Bill was liberated. By the beautiful Gospel Bill was liberated; that to save a bedraggled world of sinners, God gave His most beloved treasure, His magnificent Son. Liberated; from fear, from religious posing, from the world's hypocrisy – that kind of liberation only comes through death and resurrection. Bill was liberated in this life, ah, but *now*...

I don't know about you, but in this life, I never really feel completely free from doubt, from apprehension, from guilt and shame. But Bill... the various scrapes that Bill was in, the escape in Cambodia and all the other tight spots he found himself in in this life... they are over.

Liberated, from his own sinful nature, from this fallen creation, God has brought Bill home. The arduous journey of faith through this world, Bill has completed that journey. Having given of himself to Ingrid, to Carol and Joyce, Bill is now home. Fear is completely wiped away. The courage that comes from seeing Christ face to face has invaded His heart and mind. Now He is thoroughly familiar with the splendor of Jesus' death and what it means. That love, that sacrifice animates Bill's heart. The Lord has fought for him. He is in heaven and he is most certainly strong and courageous. Bill's cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy followed him all the days of his life and he now dwells in the Lord's presence forever.