



“A TIME TO DANCE”

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

John 14:1-12

Funeral of Dale Margerum
August 24, 2019

Our Saviour Lutheran Church
West Lafayette, IN
Rev. Dr. Steven E. Albertin

Sonya, Dale's beloved wife of (I think) 66 years, told me the other day that their long relationship began . . . prophetically and ironically . . . over a Bunsen burner in a chemistry lab at Iowa State University. What an appropriate way for two scientists to begin their life-long journey. I only met Dale in the waning days of his life. I never had the opportunity to get to know this amazing human being. But what I have learned about him in the last few weeks has revealed to me that Dale truly led a remarkable life that has left a memorable and endearing mark on the lives of many.

His professional accomplishments as a teacher, scientist and researcher were numerous. I am not even going to try to recount them. An impressive overview is reported in the obituary in your worship bulletin. However, from my conversations with Sonya, it is obvious that he was a beloved and respected colleague at Purdue. He was a careful and disciplined scientist. He was a father who loved his boys and delighted in taking them camping and enjoying the outdoors. Colorado was a frequent destination. He traveled the world and took Sonya and the boys with him when he could. He respected the talents and abilities of others. As a teacher, parent and husband he did not try to control people but sought to give others the space to pursue their interests, talents and curiosities. Sonya says she will dearly miss their companionship. They had wonderfully endless conversations. They each supported the other in their busy professional lives. She repeatedly reminded me that as busy as Dale could be, he always found time for her and the boys. Not a man of many words and long speeches, he disliked pompous and pretentious talk. His care and compassion spoke profusely of his love for Sonya and his family. His commitment to straight talk and personal integrity in this ever-duplicitous world of ours was a breath of fresh air.

Dale chose to live out his faith in God on the edges of the church and organized religion. Nevertheless, Sonya reminded me that he was always willing to support her in

her religious life and occasionally attended Our Saviour with her and the boys. However, he chose to live out his faith in his own way apart from the traditional trappings of Christianity. Sonya says, "Dale liked the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount more than Jesus the Suffering Servant." Saint Paul's famous words in today's second reading from 1 Corinthians 13 were the kind that would grab his heart and move his soul. Dale was born, baptized and raised in the Presbyterian Church in St. Louis. The faith and values that he received there quietly sustained him through his life.

Such precious memories made Dale's slow decline of the last several years difficult. It is hard to watch a loved one slowly decline to the point to where their connection to the world around them and those they love has become so tenuous and distant that they hardly seem to be the same person. That must have been especially difficult for those who knew him as brilliant teacher and researcher of chemistry.

The words from the first reading from the book of Ecclesiastes remind us of the inevitable march of time and the journey that must always come to an end. There is no escape. There is no way to dress it up. Death always abruptly ends the journey. For some that exit is more gracious than others. For all . . . it stings. St. Paul calls it "a thief in the night." But the bottom line is this: "no one gets out alive."

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: 2a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; 3a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, . . . and a time to dance;

"A TIME TO DANCE" . . . that is the ultimate purpose for our gathering here this morning. In the midst of the sorrow and tears, the loss and pain, . . . we can nevertheless DANCE. Today we rejoice and give thanks to God for the gift of Dale Margerum, who for 89 years blessed this earth. He was a blessing for Sonya, for Larry, Eric and Rich, for all in the Margerum family, for his students and colleagues at Purdue, . . . and for the science he loved and dedicated his life. Our lives would not only have been so much different but so much less without him. For that . . . for him . . . we are so grateful to the God who brought him into this world.

But there is another reason why we gather here this morning . . . and DANCE. In the Gospel reading today from John 14, Jesus had gathered with his disciples in the Upper Room. He had openly spoken of the danger that lie ahead. He said that he was going to go away, on a long trip, alone. The disciples were anxious that they would be left behind.

However, Jesus knew where he was going. Jesus assured his disciples that his trip was planned and under control. He was going to prepare a place for them.

Jesus almost sounds like the travel agent who goes ahead booking reservations for his disciples at a fine hotel. Nevertheless, his disciples are worried. How long would he be gone? Would he ever come back? Where was he going?

Again, Jesus assures them. There is no reason to worry. He will return and take them to the place he has prepared for them. He will lead them to a resort where a room has been reserved for them. Jesus has been authorized to be their travel agent by none other than almighty God.

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

Of course, Jesus will shortly be going on a trip that looks like anything but a vacation. He will be betrayed, arrested, crucified, die . . . and . . . on the third day raised from the dead. Jesus will go into the depths of the disciples’ greatest fears and even into hell itself . . . for them. When his Father raises him, God approves what Jesus has done . . . and confirms a reservation for all those whom Jesus has chosen. The disciples may have thought that Jesus was making the equivalent of a wild and foolish drive into the wilderness but Jesus knew what he was doing. He trusted his Father. His faith was not in vain.

Jesus offered that same promise to his disciples that dark night in the Upper Room. It may have looked foolish at the time, but he did not let them down. In a few days behind locked doors, afraid that Jesus had gotten lost, Jesus shows up showing them his wounds and proving that his promises could be trusted.

Dale Margerum received that same promise the day he was baptized . . . in a Presbyterian Church in St. Louis. When Dale would accompany Sonya and the boys to this place over the years, he would hear Jesus repeat that same promise to him. Today we celebrate that Jesus has finally kept that promise. Jesus has taken home one of his. Dale has cashed in. He has gone on his last vacation, his last camping trip . . . far beyond the mountains of Colorado . . . to be with all the disciples and saints who have gone before him . . . probably getting out the test tubes and conducting an experiment or two . . . and pointing out to all what a beautiful world God has made.

God blessed us with the life of Dale Margerum. He would probably be uncomfortable with such talk. Ever modest and humble, he knew what mattered most. It was not him . . . but others and this world we are constantly seeking to understand and manage for the sake of others.

Today we commend Dale Margerum to God who in Jesus Christ has promised to never let Dale disappear into nothingness. For that Promise, we rejoice, wipe away the tears and begin to DANCE!