

The Rev. Joan M. Kilian

Trinity Episcopal Church

Micah 6: 6 – 8  
James 2: 14 – 18Psalm 23  
John 14: 1 – 6-----  
**“So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”**

Serene was one of the words that Liz used to describe the love of her life, Bill. That serenity was hard earned, but it was genuine. And it was reflected in the person he grew into – a man of justice and kindness and humility. Bill was quiet. Until you got talking to him. And then he could talk of so many things. He loved learning and he loved sharing what he learned. He could learn and he could teach just about anything – physics, Latin, history – you name it. And his students loved him. As did Liz, and their daughters, Terry, Gwen and Pam, and their families. Bill delighted in his grandchildren.

Years ago, Bill’s daughter, Gwen, and her husband, Pat, gave Bill a sort of journal to write in. It was called “A Story of a Life,” and it had pages and pages of interesting questions with space to write responses. I was privileged to read a few of those pages with Bill’s responses the other day, and it gave me a glimpse inside this thoughtful, wonderful man. Bill answered many of the questions in the book. He described who God was for him: a “Higher Power,” but also a warm, loving, personal God. A God who guided Bill on his journey through this world.

One of the questions asked for Bill’s favorite passages of Scripture, and though they may have changed in the intervening years, the two he had listed were the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm and a quotation, “Faith, without works, is dead,” from this passage we just heard in the Letter of James.

Martin Luther, the 16<sup>th</sup> century German theologian, famously disagreed with James. In fact, Luther didn’t even think that the letter ought to have been included in the canon of Scripture. For Luther, salvation was by faith alone, sola fide. His point was that we can’t do good works in order to earn our way into the Kingdom of Heaven, we just have to trust in God. But I don’t think that’s what James is saying. James is saying that yes, we begin with faith. But then, our grateful response to God is to act upon that gift of faith and do “the work that God has given us do.” That in truly living into our faith, we will do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God. And that’s how I saw Bill walking through life – caring for and about others, and quietly, unassumingly, sharing his gifts: his thirst for knowledge, his serenity, his wisdom, his charity – with those around him.

One of the three things that Bill listed as his dreams to do before he died was to travel all over the USA, which he did, side by side, with Liz. They got to almost all of the fifty states on trips and in their camper. I think that one of the ways Bill found God in this world was in people, and more specifically, in the awesome diversity of people and places. And in nature. When they weren’t traveling, Bill loved sitting in their sunroom and reading, all the while watching the birds and squirrels and other critters that flitted and rambled through their backyard. He especially loved all the birds and, like St. Francis, took good care of them.

Bill wasn’t always a church-going man, but that didn’t mean he didn’t know God and commune with God. Jesus says in John’s Gospel that in ‘his Father’s house, there are many rooms.’ God has room to welcome everyone, no matter how they choose to express their spirituality and faith.

Despite numerous physical issues that he fought over the last several years of his life, Bill was a man who loved, appreciated and was fascinated by life and the world. A man with a heart as big as the world and as tender as a child's. A man who loved in an all-encompassing, non-judging, live-and-let-live kind of way. A man of gentleness and wisdom, who life bore the fruit of good works, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. A man who loved his family, his friends and his students. But, above all, a man who loved God deep in his soul.

For all the blessed, gifted things that Bill has been for each of us, we give thanks. I don't know if he ever quite knew how much he was truly accepted, forgiven and most of all loved by God. But he does now, for he rests forever with God. Today, we not only celebrate Bill's life with us, we celebrate his risen life with God through Jesus Christ. We celebrate that we shall also know the joy in which he now shares. For each of us gathered here today, God somehow touched our lives through Bill. And we give thanks for that, even as we mourn our loss.

Micah's and James' words – and Bill's life – show us what we are to be about in the here and now. Jesus' words bring us hope and comfort as we continue to live in the here and now, with only glimpses of the resurrected, Easter life which awaits us all. Something very special, very precious and sacred has come to an end, and so we are right to mourn and to weep. Our joy, our anticipation of this hope, doesn't deny the grief and tears that are part of our sorrow. But as Christians, we are an Easter people, alive in the resurrected Jesus Christ. Alive with certainty and hope, and with the memories that we treasure of those we love but see no longer. Alive with the love in our hearts that we have shared – given and received freely. Alive as children of God in the here and now, and with the trust and faith that are ours to share. Alleluia, thanks be to God!

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