

A Life of Gratitude
Reflections on Frank Mansell, Jr.
By Frank Mansell III

Psalm 118: 1-4, 21-24

The scripture which Erin read from the book of Psalms was the scripture my father preached on in his last sermon at Village Chapel, the day he retired from active ministry. I was naturally drawn back to this message, for in that sermon Dad shared the gratitude he had for all God had provided for him in his life. So, it only seems appropriate that in our gathering today, it would be in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving, for that was how Frank Mansell lived his life.

I am grateful for Dad's love of learning, and his desire to pass that knowledge and learning on to others. He was the embodiment of the "teaching elder", one title used in the Presbyterian Church for ordained ministers. He cultivated that skill early in his ministry, and was most at home in a bible study, confirmation class, or officer training event. He did not lecture or tell others what they should know – he asked questions and invited people to discover that learning through the Spirit's leading.

I am grateful for Dad's gift of mentoring youth, young adults, and future leaders of the church. Dad went on countless number of mission trips, youth retreats and conferences, because, in his words, "I especially enjoyed working with children and youth, for they have helped keep me young in heart and mind." I know Dad continued to feel young at heart as he and you at Village Chapel welcomed ten seminary students as summer interns. Robyn Garrison speaks for many of those students – and myself - when she wrote to him, "I am a better minister than I would have been for having served with you just those few months . . . Thank you for helping me think about things that are important, even essential to the life of a minister, that I would not have learned otherwise, and for being the faithful servant that you are, and modeling that for all the people you served through the years."

I am grateful for Dad's gracious, loving, and caring heart. He and Mom showed incredible hospitality to so many through the years. Dad made others feel important and valued, and rarely sought credit or the limelight. Throughout his illness this fall, Dad would ask the name of the nurses who were caring for him, and then thank them by name for their help. And Dad was a letter writer, a gift he learned from his mother. I imagine many of us gathered here today were the recipient of a card, letter, or email from Frank Mansell – probably typed, because his handwriting was awful! But his communications reflected his caring heart, as he usually wanted to lift up something you had done to make his life special. I will miss receiving those words of encouragement and love from my father.

I am grateful that Dad saw the differences between people as a gift to be utilized for God's purposes. This was formed early in his ministry, as he and Mom lived and studied with Christians from all over the world at the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches in Switzerland. Throughout his life, he was active in ecumenical ministries and efforts in the

community. And it continued in retirement, as he served faithfully every week with Habitat for Humanity to build homes for those who needed affordable housing. He learned so much from others who had different life experiences than himself. I found a quote by Neal Pressa which Dad had written on his desk which embodies this belief: "Dignify differences, don't just tolerate differences."

I am grateful for Dad's love of family, and the model he gave me for the proper balance between work and family. God was definitely at work to bring together a young man from Mississippi with a young woman from upstate New York. And for more than fifty-one years, Mom and Dad modeled what it meant to be loving partners on the adventure called marriage. He was called to be a minister in the Presbyterian Church, but his first calling was as a husband and a father. Family was of the highest priority to Mom and Dad, and most family vacations were spent travelling to family reunions at the beach, snow skiing in Vermont, or holidays at relatives' homes, all of which fostered in this only child an understanding of family that was broad and inclusive. When I married Debbie, he and Mom welcomed her as their own daughter, grateful for all that she and her family brought to their lives.

But I don't know that anything made Dad prouder or more fulfilled than being a grandfather. He baptized both Erin and Heather at the church I served in Charlotte, and even changed poop diapers – but only when no one else was available! He played all sorts of games with the girls, including "Pretty Pretty Princess," but he did have his limits – never wearing the jewelry that came with that game! Visits to Charleston often included riding bikes, ice skating, daily trips to Ellen's Ice Cream, making pancakes, playing ping pong, and working the puzzles in the newspaper. The girls could always recount the exact number of Starbucks between Charleston and Indianapolis! Family vacations to the beach, Disney World, and Europe during my sabbatical provided memories that will last a lifetime. And Mom and Dad were present for every music concert, school activity, and other important event in the lives of Erin and Heather. It has been a hard year for our family, as both of our fathers/grandfathers died in 2017. However, I am grateful for the love both Steve and Dad showed to my daughters, and how Erin and Heather's lives will forever be shaped by their grandfathers' love.

Our family is grateful – to you who have come today from near and far; to all who have walked with us these last three months with so many acts of love; to all who will continue to be by our side as we navigate this journey of grief.

May we lead lives of gratitude the way Frank Mansell led his life of gratitude, and perhaps in doing so, Dad's light will continue to shine in each of our lives.

"Give thanks to the Lord for God is good. God's steadfast love endures forever."