

Funeral Homily
Rev. Frank Mansell III
John Knox Presbyterian Church - Indianapolis, Indiana
March 11, 2017

Dr. John E. Kalsbeck
May 20, 1927 - March 7, 2017

Isaiah 12: 1-6
John 14: 1-6, 25-27

Probably the hardest thing about life is death. Our head tells us that we will not live forever, but our heart has a hard time accepting that. It is hard to wake up one day and come to realize that the world is not the same as it was the day before. The friend you relied on to tell you what you needed to hear will no longer share in those conversations. The parent who taught you about life through their love will no longer be present. The spouse who walked beside you through thick and thin, for better or worse, will no longer be there for the journey. The world is not the same today as it was yesterday.

That is death's reality. It is a shock to our system, because as human beings, we are relational. Our identity is formed by the people who are a part of our life: family, friends, classmates, coworkers, and so on. What shocks us about death is that key person, who we related to in significant and meaningful ways, is now gone. Just as our identity is formed through relationships, death alters our personal identity due to the absence of that relationship.

The challenge of the Christian faith is to trust in something we cannot see, cannot touch, and cannot hear. The challenge - and crux - of the Christian faith is to believe that death does not, in fact, have the final word. In the Presbyterian Church, we will often call a funeral service "a service of witness to the resurrection." We live our lives of faith as witnesses to the one who conquered death so that we all might have eternal life. Death may alter our identity, but our faith in the resurrection grounds our being in the One who created us, who redeems us, and who sustains us.

In our gathering together here today, we are bearing witness. We are bearing witness to God's grace and presence in the life of John Kalsbeck, one of God's children, who touched each of us and so many others in immeasurable ways. But we are also bearing witness to the fact that we trust and believe that God will be with us in all times of life, even in times of anxiety, stress, and uncertainty.

In the reading we have heard from John's Gospel, as Jesus spoke to his disciples, he knew they were worried, scared, and uncertain about what the future held if he was not going to be with them. To ease their

anxiety, Jesus assures them there is a place waiting for them in his father's kingdom. "In my Father's house, there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? I will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also." That is a great assurance to me, and I hope it is for you, as well. For in our faith in the resurrection, life does not end with the diseases we suffer from, the pain we endure, or the heartbreak we experience. Instead, eternal life is promised by the one who is "the way and the truth and the life." It is because of that faith that I know I will see and you will see John and so many others very, very soon, as we will meet in the many dwelling places that our Lord has prepared for us.

As I read Isaiah 12, I could not think of a better expression of how John Kalsbeck lived his life - that is as a life of thanksgiving for all that God had done for him. I can almost hear John speaking these words of the prophet: "Surely God is my salvation; I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation" (12:2). And as the prophet calls on us "to sing for joy and sing praises to the Lord," I cannot help but think of the many ways John bore witness as a child of God to the one who had become his salvation.

God showed us deep love and devotion to family and friends through John Kalsbeck. For fifty-seven years, John was deeply devoted to his wife Jackie, and they shared a bond that was unlike any other. They never went to bed angry with one another, and through schooling, time spent overseas, and years of parenting, work, and service to their community, John and Jackie were an example of joy and grace in their married life together. John was deeply proud of his three children - Valerie, Bill, and Lisa - and of being a grandfather to Adam and Greg. And the gleam in his eye was incredibly bright when he shared that he would be a great-grandfather to Grayson and Avery.

God cared for others through the life of John Kalsbeck. John's career touched the lives of thousands of people, as he served on the faculty of the IU School of Medicine, and as a pediatric neurosurgeon at Riley Hospital for Children. But it wasn't just his technical expertise that impacted and saved lives. It was his deep care for his patients that lasted a lifetime. Letters, wedding invitations, birth announcements, Christmas cards - John and Jackie would receive these in the mail from past patients and their families, because John treated his patients as if they were his own children. And in so doing, he exhibited the deep love God has for all of God's children in this world.

But what stunned me about John several years ago was to learn that he was dyslexic. He said that as a child, he was sent to a trade school, because of his difficulty with reading. And yet, that did not stop him from pursuing what he felt called to do with the gifts God has blessed him with. That is a testament to John's character, and a

reminder to us all that no matter what perceived obstacles might be in our way, God will always find a way.

God brought us joy and a smile through John Kalsbeck. He may have been a brilliant physician, but he also had a wonderful sense of humor. He loved to tell stories, many of which poked fun at himself, and he had a great grin that would make you laugh. Apparently, he also had a knack for procrastinating and putting things off – including shopping for his wife at Christmas. Val and Lisa said they have many funny memories of last-minute shopping with their dad on Christmas Eve!

God helped us appreciate this beautiful world and the arts through John Kalsbeck. John was born and raised in Michigan, and his place of renewal was at their condo there and also being near Lake Michigan. He found fellowship and enjoyment with friends and family on the golf course, or in sharing a meal – and a bottle of wine! – together, or appreciating beautiful music and art. In retirement, John took up the hobby of glass blowing, and he and Jackie were longtime patrons of the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra. The visual and performing arts brought John closer to God and others, and in his lifetime he wanted others to experience that same beauty in their lives.

God deepened others' faith through John Kalsbeck. John was raised in the Christian Reformed Church in Michigan, graduating from Calvin College. When he and Jackie, an Episcopalian, got married, they found somewhat neutral ground in the Presbyterian Church! And upon their settling in Speedway in the early-1960s, they took a step out in faith to come together with others on the west side to help found John Knox Presbyterian Church.

What always impressed me about John was how he led others – not in loud, in-your-face ways, but through in quiet, humble ways. John served as an elder within the first ten years of our church being founded. But what I was taken by was how, as the old E. F. Hutton commercial used to say, “When John talked, people listened.”

Twelve years ago, we started having preliminary conversations about our worship space, and asking the question, “Should we replace our old sanctuary with a new space?” I was very mindful of those in our church, including John, who had been here from the beginning, and for whom the old sanctuary held many important memories. So I will admit, that when the focus group that was talking about the worship space met one Sunday, and I saw John Kalsbeck stand up to speak, I held my breath!

When he spoke, everyone listened. And through John, God spoke to us. John did not look backwards, but was looking forward to the future, and how a new space could be a great improvement over what we had at the time. John backed that up with his ideas and his consistent support, and just as he was a foundation for this church 55

years ago, he was a foundation for us once again in that key transition moment, which would impact our life for years to come.

But I also think John had a secondary motivation for a new worship space to be created. You see, his love of art and glass blowing intersected with this space. John yearned to see stained glass in our worship space. And when he heard a past member of our church made stained glass, his mission was set before him! He never wanted the attention or the credit. But it is because of John Kalsbeck that these beautiful stained glass windows were commissioned, adding to his and Jackie's contributions of visual art which we enjoy throughout our church. That is just one of the many, lasting legacies God forged through the life of John Kalsbeck.

One of John's favorite authors was C. S. Lewis. In looking through a multitude of quotes by that noted writer, two in particular spoke to me as it related to John and how I knew him. The first is, "True humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself less" (<http://www.kevinhalloran.net/best-c-s-lewis-quotes/>). John was the definition of humility, a man who was always thinking of others before thinking of himself.

The second is, "Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in" (*Mere Christianity*). John always looked for Christ first, and in so doing, God lifted all of us up through him.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Thanks be to God. Amen.