

PARKER DRUMMOND WYMAN

Burial Office, All Saints' Church, Chevy Chase, Maryland
March 23, 2009

Lamentations 3.22-26, 31-33
Revelation 21.2-7
John 14.1-6

We gather today in the Lord's presence to commemorate and to celebrate the life of Parker Wyman. Both commemoration and celebration call for reflection on the meaning of his life: what in the end does it amount to? We have heard about his qualities as a Foreign Service Officer from Ambassador Sutterlin. From family members we have heard about him as husband and father and grandfather. What I will attempt is a theological and scriptural framework for these things, still viewing them through the lens of my own Foreign Service experience.

I can't claim I knew Parker well. I spoke with him occasionally here at All Saints', of which he was a valued member. But our significant contact was about a month ago, when he and Pat asked me to stop by. I did not know quite what to make of his illness. He spoke of a brain tumour but characteristically did not make much of it; he spoke more of his diminished ability to look after Pat. Still I was impressed with the essential goodness of the man: quiet, unassuming, above all faithful, faithful to his family and friends as in the performance of his professional duties. And he spoke of the Foreign Service as having been a good life. My impression was confirmed by talking with some who knew him, and abundantly by what we have just been hearing. His having been liked by those serving both over him and under him stood out for me particularly. In the Foreign Service this does not always happen.

I picked up something else as well. Although his tumor progressed rapidly, he did not die suddenly and unprepared. I remark on this because one of the supplications in the Great Litany, which goes back to the year 1544 and which we recite here every Ash Wednesday, is

From dying suddenly and unprepared, good Lord deliver us.

Instead, although reserved about his condition, he told me that it could go either way. And he said this plainly. Further, as Pat has me let me know, some months before there was any concern about his health, he wrote down the Scripture readings and hymns for his funeral service, as if he had an intimation of what was coming. We are observing his choices today.

And his scripture choices afford us I think a special insight into his mind and character. The first was our Old Testament reading, Lamentations 3.22-26 and 31-33, read by his daughter Cheryl. The setting for the Book of Lamentations was the city of Jerusalem after its destruction by the Babylonians, back in 589 BC. The book begins, "How lonely sits the city that was full of people." Yet amid this desolation the biblical writer affirms the steadfast love of the Lord, love that can be relied on, his hope in the Lord, his willingness to wait and to wait quietly. That such expressions should have resonated with Parker bespeaks his own deep trust in the Lord, his own faithfulness.

Parker's second choice, which I read as our Gospel, was John 14.1-6. Its resonance for him speaks further of his faith and his faithfulness. The passage carries the Lord's

relation with his people on to a further stage. He has now come to them, specifically to the disciples, in the person of his Son. The Son, Jesus, must now leave them, as he goes to Golgotha and the cross. Yet he speaks of returning to take them with him, so that they may be with his Father and with him. Despite this assurance the disciple Thomas expresses doubt, as we all at times doubt: "Lord, we do not know where you are going; how can we know the way?" To this Jesus responds with perhaps the most ringing of his declarations: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except by me." The second part of this means that if we come to the Father by Jesus, then we know that we come indeed.

We have still to address the question of the meaning of Parker's life: what in the end does it amount to? This question concerns all of us but perhaps especially when we have been formed in the Foreign Service. It is an exhilarating profession. In it we deal with matters of critical importance, for the nation and the world. We know that if our performance falls short, the effects can be far-reaching. It stretches us to the utmost, through the challenge of exceedingly difficult assignments, which we find we can accomplish after all. And we have the satisfaction of working as a team, trusted by our colleagues and trusting them in turn. We may attain to a certain rank. Yet once we are out of the Foreign Service, as in retirement, what are we left with? What was Parker left with?

To answer this question we must go outside our readings for this service. We must go to the Parable of the Talents in the Gospel according to St. Matthew (chapter 25, verses 14 to 30). In this Parable a man departing on a journey entrusts his servants with talents, worth large sums, to be looked after while he is away. On his return he finds that the servants, or two of the three, have not only safeguarded them but have employed them productively, doubling his money. And he says to each of these, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." So too with Parker's faithfulness. He was faithful with earthly things, in the Foreign Service and elsewhere. And this parable teaches his faithfulness, even if only transiently esteemed by the world, matters to God. It matters to the point that God will set him over heavenly things, giving him joy in God's eternal kingdom.

And our second reading, Revelation 21.2-7, by daughter Candace, provides us with our account of God's kingdom. It was chosen not by Parker but by Pat, and I think it was an inspired choice. Listen to this ecstatic vision.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people. And God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.

The new Jerusalem which this speaks of represents the kingdom of God. It is the heritage which Parker is entering. And through him we can see that it is open also to us, still here on earth. For this and for him let us give thanks and praise, and glory to God. *Amen.*

The Rev. Theodore L. Lewis