

[send this](#)[bookmark](#)[print](#)[close](#)

The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.35 No.24

The Fourth Sunday after Easter

05/09/04

In Memoriam Dulcem: A Year Later

On May 11th we mark the anniversary of blessed William's death. What a strange and different world it has been since. I have often wondered what he would do in some of our present circumstances, and on occasion I have asked for his prayers. How high William sits in the Kingdom of Heaven I dare not venture to guess. But I am certain that the clarity of mind and generosity of heart that are his have grown immeasurably greater.

Round and about the national church, nothing much has changed. The Episcopal Church is still estranged from the authority of the Bible. If they could begin to read it like any other book, they would find, as William taught, that the Bible is like no other book. Based on his test of authentication I suppose that the Bishops, infatuated with their own tergiversations, cannot begin to read the Bible like any other book, or perhaps they cannot read at all. How often I hear that voice, saying with good humor and all seriousness, "I'm just a Bible-believing Christian trying to get along in an uncertain world!"

The present House of Bishops, with their idolatrous worship of power, invoking Canons as if they were the Word of God, and blind to what those Canons are meant to safeguard, would have incurred the steady wrath of William's pen. I believe that he would have encouraged us (and I mean encourage in the sense of inspiring and instigating courage) to do exactly what we as a parish have done.

For the most part, the clergy remain as pusillanimous as ever. Only a few in our Diocese have understood the rapid decline of the church, what is truly at stake, and been willing to say so. Others have been afraid of losing position, privilege, and comfort. Some have been intimidated. It seems that the Bishop of Georgia has embraced the national church sympathetically. He has done nothing to defend orthodox morality. O well, William was never much for the company of clergy, if all it meant was another opportunity to parade the collar. As I said, nothing much has changed.

As for the ideology of unbridled passion, William would not be shocked. His Platonism prepared him for the demise of western culture. And while he was not ugly in his condemnation of sexual license, he was clear that this was not something the church could ever bless. His usual response to developments like these was a mild exasperation "Ain't life grand!" (To review his article, written in 1994, go to the church's website: www.stjohnssav.org and click on Parish Papers, then

on 2003, and then on "Human Sexuality (III): Keep It Simple").

As for our own parish, I believe William would be very pleased. We continue with the liturgy and hymnody that he shaped and formed. We are not especially high nor are we very low in Churchmanship. A bit of our practice is best called Ralstonian. As he was so fond of referring to the higher critical theory of Old Testament authorship, especially the "J" writer, I like to think of our Ralstonian practice as originating with the "R" writer. This was a joke we often shared.

Most of all, we adhere to the Book of Common Prayer, and make our journey through the changes and chances of this mortal life by the deep wisdom and careful devotion of Archbishop Cranmer and Queen Elizabeth I. That we continue to use the Prayer Book is a matter of true Religion. Its theology is both catholic and reformed, and its prayers articulate that sublime synthesis with poetical precision. Those who judge that our use of the Prayer Book is merely an antiquarian taste for precious language have no inkling of what they are talking about.

William was absolutely correct in believing that the decline of the Episcopal Church began decisively with the so-called revision of the Prayer Book. Far from a revision – a vision seen again - there was simply no vision at all in what the Standing Liturgical Commission foisted upon naïve Bishops and devoted but unsuspecting laity. The change in Theology and Religion was the result of more than a century of theological dry rot. Our current problems tap into that same lifeless root.

There are a number of memorials in honor of William that are in the works. On the third floor of the new educational building, the Ralston Room is an area set aside for lectures and a wide array of learning in the humanities. We are still in the process of accepting designated gifts to appoint this room with elegance and charm. After the Ralston Room is finished, we shall be able to address and support other important memorials, all of which would mortify, and please, him immensely.

Still, nothing meant more to Fr. Ralston than the life of worship with the Prayer Book at St. John's Church. Everything he knew and loved, in music and literature, was formed in relation to the Religion that he lived by that singular book. Our greatest memorial to him is a living one, in which we continue in the orthodox faith articulated in the Anglican Way. With him we acknowledge and respect other ways, but with him also, we shall not shrink from practicing our faith in the integrity of Anglican conception. Following Keats, William taught us,

"Beauty is truth, truth beauty, - that is all ye know on earth,

and all ye need to know."

The void left by his death remains. We miss him. But a profound joy abides. Our communion with William and with all the faithful departed in Christ is ever living and growing. We have a sure and certain hope, and so, with Donne,

"One short sleep past, we wake eternally,

And death shall be no more;

Death, thou shalt die.”

So, in honor of William, lift a glass of Old Weller, or a Tanqueray martini, and pledge: “Confusion to the enemy!” Our happy reunion will not be long. In the twinkling of an eye, our distance shall pass away.

Almighty God, we remember this day before thee thy faithful Priest, William, and we pray that, having opened to him the gates of larger life, thou wilt receive him more and more into thy joyful service; that he may win, with thee and thy servants everywhere, the eternal victory; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

send this

bookmark

print

close

[Report Errors](#) | [Comments](#)

Copyright 2003 - 2004 St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah, GA. All rights reserved.