

Requiem Eucharist for John Andrews
 Saturday, 13 October 2012
 Saint Martin's Church – Charlotte, North Carolina
 The Very Reverend L. Murdock Smith, PhD

Opening acclamation.

One of the great things about being in a parish for a long time is that you have the privilege of getting to know some people in ways that stay with you for a lifetime. Sometimes this is because of the circumstances or events of their lives that draw you in, but other times it is just who they are that brings a smile to your face and to your soul. This is very true when I think about John and the privilege it is to me to be part of today's celebration.

What I have to say today is more about the *theological why* of being here than, if you will, the *personal* about John. But when you start to think about this, it is not possible to keep these two dimensions nice and separate ... particularly when you consider this our brother in Christ whose life and new life we celebrate this day. I do not believe that I could separate, even if I wished, the who of John is as a person from the who of John is as a child of God.

Let me continue with telling three brief *stories* about John that set the stage for what follows.

The first has to do with his politics and his clear lean to left of center. The important part of this for him was it was not just an intellectual statement, but one that was given form and substance through action. This was less about partisan politics and infinitely more about justice ... the justice that is inherent in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Perhaps the clearest expression of this was John's involvement with and commitment to Swann Fellowship. For, with the end of busing in the Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools, segregation was returning, and John acted. He saw this as a mistake; that this was contrary to Gospel; and it was definitely wrong to John. He spoke, he wrote, he acted, and he did not hold back. His faith was given voice and deed.

The second story tells of the importance of John as a source of guidance, of wisdom about how to respond in difficult situations. It was recounted that when a group of young singles were faced with a challenging situation, their search for answers often were tied with wondering what John's response might be. You might think that those wrist bands with *WWJD* meant *What Would Jesus Do?*; but to these seekers of answers it meant *What Would John Do?*

Finally, just before I came here to St. Martin's in May 1999, John had a bit of a cardiac episode that had Polly calling Medic. The EMTs had responded, taken care of the immediate needs, and were ready to transport John to the hospital. Not knowing which of our several hospitals preferred, he was asked "Presbyterian?" To which he quickly answered, "No, Episcopalian!" John knew where his theology found a home.

Hold onto these stories, these reference points.

One of the great things about being involved in parish ministry is the getting to know people in very particular ways. I may be wrong on this but I believe that John served more terms on Vestry and as Senior Warden than anyone else in the history of St. Martin's and, perhaps, even in the entire Episcopal Church. He was one of my Senior Wardens. It has been a joy over the years to look out into the nave and to see John and Polly in their "regular pew" ... for a while just the two of them and then later on with their grandchildren.

Part of what we celebrate today is the recognition that being a part of a church, a faith community, means that you are involved and engaged. We have the promise of what is to come after our death to this world, but it is that a promise based on our trust in God. What we do have

here and now, are those who have given heart and soul to living the faith in our presence, making a difference by what they say and what they do.

Part of what celebrate today is the witness of those who have shown us how to live a life defined by faith – not a life of perfection because I feel sure that both Polly and Ellen could disabuse us of this. But it is not our imperfections that are important, but rather our efforts to become more perfect in our journey back to God. Today is about recognizing and remembering one of the saints of God from whom we can learn, using his life as guide in our own efforts.

Our brother in Christ, John, showed us what it means to take seriously the justice to which God calls us. He showed us the power of sharing with others what we have learned—by being that mentor, that guide, that *anam cara*. John also showed a sense of loyalty to a community that helped to form him in this particular expression of Christianity. Additionally, he showed us the power of fidelity through fifty-two years of marriage and his love for Polly. He showed us the beauty of a father's love for his daughter; then for the man who became her husband; and finally for his grandchildren. The great ones of the world may be known in history books; but the ones who change the world are known by their love, their actions, and the words. This is whom we celebrate today, and is a witness of God's transforming love to us.

So, as we move ahead today, listen to the prayers and rejoice; receive the Sacrament and be fed. When the family gathers in the Memorial Garden for the interment, do not be afraid of what comes with life, but know that we all return to God's Creation and God's embrace. Gather in the Fellowship Hall after this service, greet one another, tell stories, shed some tears, and then laugh together. Know that it is hard to say goodbye to someone whom we love, but also know that life is not ended but it is transformed in Christ.

Amen.