

Pastor Troy E. Medlin
Jim Barkenquast Memorial Service
Grace, River Forest
11/22/2024

Laura, Martin, all who knew and loved Jim: grace, mercy, and peace be yours this day and all days, in the name of the one in whom Jim was baptized, the one he proclaimed, whose praises he sang, and with whom he now dwells: The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

I was inspired by how Jim lived. Open. Arms outstretched. By and from the heart.

A year and half ago I was giving an adult ed presentation on my theological influences, and of course, Jim, ever the curious and earnest theologian, was in the front row paying close attention. I was talking about this book (Lutheranism as a Theological Movement) and the differences between Lutheran and Reformed Christology. I was explaining how as Lutherans we confess that Christ is never far away, not simply off somewhere waiting for a time in the future to come down to us again. But, Christ is made flesh again and again in and for the sake of our own vulnerable flesh, in bread and wine, water, word, stranger, stuff of the earth, and in each proclamation of promise that encounters us in our own sin and death and in each experience of existential dread-- breathing new life into our tired bones. That- for Lutherans Christ is alive and active. Meeting us in every moment, in every dead end, in every lost place- with resurrection and with a love that always keeps going, as St. Paul proclaimed in Romans. The right hand of God after all is everywhere. Forever the resurrection and the life-- now. Today. For you.

Jim got it. For him- this was visceral. I know this truth had become real for him a thousand times over nine decades. He spoke this good news back to me with tears in his eyes some weeks later. This concept had traveled from his head to his heart and become life. Salvation. Nourishment. Sustenance. Daily bread. More than enough for each day of his earthly sojourn. This was and is Jim's God. The one who always draws near in Jesus Christ.

That was the Jim I knew whether at Men of Grace or Cornerstones. Passionate. Gentle. Tender-hearted. Faith-infused. Full of energy till the end. Always with a song on his lips. Embodying what Hildegard of Bingen might call a kind of Viriditas or greenness. Or like what Pascal wrote, "Since about half-past ten in the evening until about half-past midnight. FIRE. Certitude. Feeling. Joy. Peace." Even as his outward body and mind showed signs of age- his heart was being renewed day by day. There was no doubt about that.

In baptism Jim was made a beloved child of God. Sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. There Jim died the only death that ever needed to be feared. Joined to

Christ's death, every death from there on out simply became a gate- a door- a way-- into abundant life. Especially this last one. Like Lazerus, as with Christ, though we die, we live.

In that spacious abundant life he created a home for you, Laura, passed down a vibrant faith, and served the church and world in so many ways.

Now Jim dwells forever in the presence of the God he knew so well by heart. That heart at peace, with boundless joy, and his voice now a part of the hymn of all creation. Singing without end to the God of resurrection.

Jim- your baptismal journey is now complete. Our God who always comes close, now closer still. For you, as for all of us: even though we die, still, against all odds, today, tomorrow and always: we live.