**“All Shall be Well”**

The Rev. Christopher Wendell

A homily for Paul West’s Memorial Eucharist

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St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

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I wish Paul had been here this week, because I know he could have helped me come up with the perfect pun to begin this homily. There are many things I will miss about Paul, and his sense of humor is close to the top of the list. Paul’s sense of humor was….well, it was Paul’s sense of humor. Dry, smart, observant, but never bitter or jaded, the way so much humor is these days. His humor was always life affirming, even when the life it affirmed was truly absurd.

Since Paul’s not here to help me open this homily, I’ll turn instead to the words of a 2nd century theologian Irenaeus of Lyon. Words which have been turning over in my head since last Wednesday, when Paul died. “The Glory of God is the human person, fully alive.” “The Glory of God is the human person, fully alive.” Let’s just ponder that one for a second. Let it sink in…because it’s a beautiful truth. It’s beautiful to acknowledge that God’s dream for us is that we might discover and live into the fullness of what it means to be really alive. That this, above all else, is what brings Glory to God. More than obedience. More than church attendance. More even, than praying. God is praised when we fully become the person we have been created to be.

Now that’s not just beautiful. It’s also a tall order. I think very few of us in this world, are really fully alive, in the way Irenaeus meant. Most of us are somewhere on the journey towards this fullness of life that God so deeply hopes for us. And Paul. Well Paul was pretty far along. And though many of us are struggling this week to find the words to say what it is we will miss about Paul, for me it is this: he was fully alive to himself. He was fully alive to others. And he was fully alive to God. That is to say, he was pretty far along in cherishing himself for the person he was, in cherishing others for the people they were, and in cherishing God as God really is. And so Paul’s life reflected to many of us the Glory of God, the beauty of God, the kindness of God.

Now, this is not to say that Paul was perfect. He wasn’t. Some of the jokes were bad, ok, most of the jokes were bad. But more than that, he often talked to me about finding himself challenged to engage in this ministry of cherishing and gentleness that brought him such a full life. It took effort. And sometimes that effort was hard to muster for him. But he knew it was how he wanted to live, and he was pretty sure it was how God wanted him to live too. And I think he was right about that. So even though not all his relationships were “challenge free” and not all the rough edges of his heart and soul had been smoothed over before his death, he was deeply committed to cultivating a faithful gentleness in his life.

I believe it was this ability to be gentle with himself, and with others, and with God which filled the well of deep compassion and empathy that so many of us drank from whenever we ran into Paul. And I think what has made me so very sad the past few days, has been the thought that this well won’t be around anymore for me to come and drink from…at least, not in the same way.

The Gospel passage that we read a few minutes ago reminds us that we all need a good well in our lives, a place where we can go for refreshment and renewal. For the Samaritan woman and for all women whose lives revolved around fetching water, knowing where to find the good well, the deep well, was like gold. It was something worth passing on from generation to generation, all the way back to Jacob. When a well dried up, life had to change. Patterns of daily routines had to be altered. New pathways for travel had to be sought out. Relationships that were formed in fellowship around the well entered new phases. New wells had to be found, or dug.

So it is with us today, who have lost this well that was Paul. We will need to find new sources of the compassion, gentleness and humor, which so frequently refreshed us from this particular well. But you know, the well is not the same as the water. And though we don’t have the well anymore -- the water that lived within that well continues to flow throughout all Creation. Because, as Jesus reminds us, the living water, the kind of water Paul offered to us, is like a spring within us, gushing up to eternal life -- a spring that fills us with God’s love and frees us from our hardest burdens.

Paul was not the living water, but Paul was a source of living water for many of us. Water that made us more fully alive. Now that he is in heaven, we may not have the well, but we still have the Living Water that made the well so wonderful. We still have access to things about Paul that helped us see God, each other, and ourselves, more clearly. Now, the living waters gush up inside of us, filling us with the same compassion and gentleness and commitment and integrity that was in Paul, and that was in Christ. As our lives continue to shift in the days ahead, for some of us slightly, for some of us dramatically, these waters, and the memories of our times at the well, will sustain us in that journey. In fact, they may, in time, help us to become more fully alive, and ourselves to become wells of living water for others.

I can only think of one way to wrap this homily up. And that is with a bad pun that has good meaning. So here it is, Paul, are you ready? From the mystical writings of Julian or Norwich,

All shall be well

and all shall be well

and all manner of things, shall be well.

Amen.