

11/4/2017
AL Williams Memorial Service
John 14:1-7, 25-27

When we were planning this service back in early September, it didn't dawn on me that it would be the day before the church celebrates a special day called "All Saints Day." Presbyterians don't spend a lot of time talking about specific Saints, because we believe that the grace of Jesus Christ is for everyone. When we die we enter the eternal kingdom of God and so we are all Saints. One of the Bible passages that we point to for this belief is from the Book of Revelation. The writer of that book is describing a spiritual experience in which he had a vision of heaven. He saw *a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages*. It was a timeless vision of heaven and guess what it's not just Christians who are there. It is all kinds of people with all kinds of faith and even no faith. And guess what else. They are having one big party. This picture of heaven is consistent with the words of Jesus spoken to the disciples at the Last Supper on the night of his arrest.

So, this is the place where Jesus tells us about everlasting life. According to John's Gospel, Jesus knew what was going to happen to him. He knew the disciples would be devastated by the loss of his physical presence. And so he is assuring them that they will not in fact be alone. First, he will be present with us always through the Holy Spirit. Second, when this life is over, he will come for us and take us to himself.

It is a wonderful, amazing, joyful thing. It is the reason we can celebrate the life of a beloved father, grandfather, brother in Christ and friend. Cris captured Al perfectly. He was an exuberant, energetic and extremely physically fit up until the last few weeks of his life. He could get passionate about political and social issues. Whenever the Tallahassee Democrat published his letters, they put a disclaimer at

the bottom: “this Alan Williams is not State Representative Alan William..” It was hardly necessary because no one reading one of Al’s letters would have thought he was the liberal Democrat Representative. I teased him once about sounding like a liberal environmentalist when he was haranguing the City of Tallahassee for letting the lakes in Killearn become grossly polluted. He laughed and said no, no, holding the government accountable isn’t liberal.

He was a classic conservative on political issues. But you know what? He accepted me, and turned to me as his pastor from day one. And he never even flinched when some of our long-time members, and his close friends, quit our church because we believe in marriage equality. Because he was first of all a Christian. He didn’t go around trying to brow beat other people about it. But he understood that following Christ is about loving God and that if you love God you love all people, just as God does without judgment, condemnation or exclusion.

Just the day before he died, Al and I had a conversation about death. He had no fear and he was ready. He knew it was going to be soon and he knew it was going to be good. And now He and Joan are together again and guess what. It is one great party. No illness, no worries, no anxiety. Because Jesus came for him on September 7th and took him to the place that God prepared for them long before he knew anything of it. Do not let your hearts be troubled, do not let them be afraid.