

**Sermon Preached by The Reverend Jonathon W. Jensen, Rector**  
**Calvary Episcopal Church, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania**  
**The Third Sunday in Lent, Year A**  
**March 19, 2017**

***Romans 5:1-11***

I recently planned my own funeral. Don't worry. My health is good and my mind is clear. That is the best time to prepare. Most people avoid thinking about such things but consider... Do you plan for retirement? Do you plan and save for your children's college education? Do you make advanced medical directives? Do you even plan for your summer vacation? Why not plan, ahead of time, your own funeral? Think of it as "advanced spiritual directives." The usual response is, "I'll be dead, so it won't matter." That is true, in a sense, of course. The preparation, however, is not for you but for those whom you love.

Planning your own funeral now causes us to think about death, not in general but in particular – *our* death. More importantly, it causes us to think about what matters most in life, our lives and those whom we love. That's part of the point of early preparation. The clergy can help when you are ready.

Lent is a church season given to reflect on what matters most – life and death – but to do so in the context of our Christian hope. Our hope is that we will be with God and those whom we love forever – without loss or fear.

In that Christian hope, in the season of Lent, I plan my own funeral each year. Rite I *with* incense. The readings are all chosen. The music is Anglican chant, a little Gospel, and my favorite composer, Arvo Part, at the beginning and end. The columbarium at Calvary will be my final resting place. The church will get everything I have, such as it is, when I am gone. There is a deep peace to all of that.

But here's the hard part – What does one do for a sermon or eulogy? One thing *is* clear: If the preacher goes more than fifteen minutes, Alan (or his successor) is invited to play the theme from Jaws on the organ louder and louder, like the Academy Awards, until the sermon is brought to a swift conclusion. Not while I am the one preaching, please.

What does one do in a funeral sermon or eulogy? In the fullest sense, we try to put the person's life and death in the context of our resurrection faith. What has the person's life meant? What did she accomplish? What did he value or stand for or believe in? Did she learn to give and receive love? Who *was* he and who *now is* he in Christ?

While preparing for this year's version of my funeral, I encountered a book by the columnist David Brooks titled, *The Road to Character*. It is not perfect but no books or lives ever are. Still, it has value. *The Road to Character* is about how to cultivate a life worth living.

Paul's letter to the Church in Rome is focused on that. This whole sermon is simply an indirect way of coming at Paul's idea in today's epistle. Experience of failure and suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. And character produces hope. Hope is in short supply these days but desperately needed.

Brooks frames the discussion by offering an image for two competing sets of values that we face every day of our lives. He calls the two sets of values, Adam I and Adam II. Adam was the archetypal man in the Garden of Eden from the Book of Genesis. Eve I and II would work just as well.

Adam or Eve I is the drive to accomplish and make things. It is to be recognized, to be successful, to be respected, to be the center of the universe, to stand out, to be special, to build an impressive resume. It is further to avoid pain or failure or heartbreak. It is to add things to bring temporary distractions or stave off the inevitable decline and death. Adam I mainly takes, rather than gives, to make his life a little better. It is, effectively, an eternal immaturity of spirit. Our American culture emphasizes and supports this all the time in a myriad of ways. The author calls Adam I a life of building *resume* virtues.

Adam or Eve II is focused differently. It is we or us rather than I or me. It is the drive to seek meaning, to work with a purpose, to find and give love, to embrace value in what you can put your arms around. Creating and accomplishments are good but they are not done to build a resume... they are part of a life shared. Adam and Eve II recognize they are not the center of the universe and don't try to be. It is further to learn from – rather than avoid – pain, failure, and heartbreak that develop quality of character. Rather than primarily take, Adam II mainly gives to the family, the community, to the world to make it a little bit better than he found it. It is a desire to cultivate spiritual and emotional maturity. The Christian faith and the great religions of the world, at best, emphasize and support this. The author calls this a life of building *eulogy* virtues. It is a life of character giving birth to hope.

Worshipping as a church, learning with one another, serving our neighbors together, creating beauty and hope as a community... they are each a call and reminder to focus on what cultivates eternal value in our lives and in the world.

Adam I and Adam II are the two, competing sets of values we face every day. Which one is dominant in our nation? Which one guides your life?

This brings me back to the sermon for my funeral. What type of life have I been trying to cultivate? Are they resume virtues or eulogy virtues? I made two lists. One example from each will suffice. He successfully sat through more than 400 vestry board meetings and did not kill a single person that we know of. That can feel true at times. When the better angels win out, it is never about me at all. I am always trying to live up to the person my dog thinks I am and the person my wife has loved me into being.

What would you say about yourself for your own funeral sermon? The purpose is not to try to make oneself into a super-hero or super-saint or super-sinner but become more fully aware of who you are. The Road to Character always has lots of twists, turns, dead ends, and detours but it always leads to hope.

What type of life are you cultivating?