

March 24, 2018

**In Memoriam: Duff Green (Sept. 27, 1936 – Dec. 21, 2017)**

It's going to be hard for me, as I know it will be for so many of you, to imagine my day-to-day world without Duff Green in it anymore, to accept the fact that I just won't be able to call him up if I need to ask for some advice or just shoot the breeze because, as I reminded him when Lucy and I spoke with him on the phone the weekend before he died, Duff was one of my dearest colleagues; he was our pastor, the officiant at our wedding, and the priest who saw us through seminary and presented me for ordination.

I was glad that he told us when we talked that he felt good about coming home to Crawfordsville and to St. John's.

"It was a good place for us to be," I remember him saying. "It's the right place. We were happy there."

Duff was looking back at a long and varied ministry, with its triumphs and its disappointments (something every ministry has), delighted to find that the time he had spent with the people of St. John's was truly the most fulfilling of all (though he might have a word or two to say about the snow that the search committee chair told him he'd never have to worry about!).

How blessed we are to welcome him home!

How privileged we are to be chosen for the task of commending his soul to the care of Almighty God!

How grateful we are for the memories we will always have in our hearts of this wonderful man!

Most of you probably know this already, but, if you don't, our bishop ended up with more to do today than she planned on.

A few minutes from now hundreds of concerned youth will start "March[ing] for [Their] Lives" in Indianapolis, and later on this afternoon, after presiding at this service, Bishop Jennifer will be joining them.

And, you know, if he could pull it off, the Rev. Duff Green would be right there with her because that's the kind of thing Duff did.

And you and I would probably be right there with him because Duff knew how to get people involved in things that really mattered.

By the time he got to Crawfordsville and St. John's he had already marched with other clergy in Memphis at the height of the civil rights movement (though not always to great applause), and he was ready to do it here, if it was called for, and to do it alone, if he

had to, though he could usually count on having at least someone to march with because, as a member of St. John's who remembers him well said to me not too long ago: "Duff knew how to pull you in."

Pulling people in—doesn't that sound like something Jesus spent an awful lot of time trying to teach his disciples to do: to take a break from landing fish and start landing people instead? That's the brand of evangelism that the Reverend Duff Green practiced and the brand of evangelism that he taught his congregation to practice: "Wasn't that your priest at the blessing of the hounds last weekend, the one who also blessed the fox?" "Yes, that's him. Come to the pitch-in we're having at church next Sunday, and I'll introduce you."

The people of St. John's soon learned that sometimes an earnest invitation akin to "Come on in! The water's fine!" was all that was needed to bring someone into St. John's, though as visible as Duff was around town, he often didn't need an introduction.

But getting people into the Church is only the beginning of evangelism.

The mission of the Church, as stated in the Catechism, "is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ"; it's

all about the ministry of reconciliation, the promotion of justice, peace, and love among all people and in all of creation.

Duff Green, gifted pastor that he was, knew that “in-reach” is as important as outreach.

Duff knew that you have to do more than just bring people into the Church; you need to help them find their place in the Church so that they will thrive as faithful Christians.

Encouraging the building of relationships and doing everything you can to nurture those relationships is at the heart of parish ministry.

And those relationships need to be maintained.

Sometimes it’s a matter of checking to see if the ties that bind are still secure.

As our own Sam Hildebrand, writing about Duff’s years here in *The Story of St. John’s and Its People*, observed, “[If] you were a habitual church attender and planned to be absent on a Sunday, ...it was wise to let Duff...know beforehand, or you would receive a call or a visit after services to learn if you were ill, or whatever. He was a true shepherd of his flock.”

Not that this particular shepherd didn't need to use the crook on his staff to rein in a parishioner or two now and then.

It helps if a priest's pastoral zeal is informed by a discerning heart, and Duff had both of these virtues in abundance.

Whether it was someone who needed to slow down long enough to smell the flowers or someone who seemed unable to deal with the shock of a life-changing event or even someone who needed to think seriously about changing vocational direction, Duff knew when to pull you aside and say, "We need to talk."

Would that every Christian had a like measure of such pastoral sensitivity and the courage to act on it with resolve!

Ever the conscientious educator (after all, he brought TEE, Theological Education by Extension, which eventually became EFM, Education for Ministry, to the Diocese) our brother Duff chose the readings for this service, and I know that as a priest who was especially fond of the collect that treats Holy Scripture as something Christians need to hear, read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest he chose them for a reason: to be a source of comfort to his family and his friends.

What would Duff want us to pay particular attention to in these lessons?

What would he want us to see?

Certainly the attitude toward life as expressed in the passage from Ecclesiastes—not just acceptance, but the whole-hearted embrace of everything that life has to offer, even death, but death as only one aspect of life—this is an attitude that he would definitely urge us to espouse.

“...a time to weep, and a time to laugh”.

Do I suddenly hear the welcome sound of Duff’s mischievous, gravel-voiced guffaw, especially if he thought things were getting a little too serious?

“...a time to mourn, and a time to dance.”

Lingering too long on one aspect of our mortal life, the knowing poet in Ecclesiastes cautions, will keep us from enjoying so much of what is left for us to encounter—not exactly “Don’t worry, be happy!”, but maybe more like, “Welcome all that life sends your way and do it with a grateful heart!”

Can we afford to do anything less this day, as we gather to express our sorrow at the loss of our dear brother, yet at the same time express our joy in the hope of the resurrection that every child of God has been promised?

Writing to Christians in Rome, the apostle Paul had it right, after reciting a catalog of possible obstacles, some of which he personally had been able to overcome—hardship, distress, persecution—some of which he would still have to face—famine, nakedness, peril, the sword—when he was led to conclude that nothing, “neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, no heights, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Jonathan and Deborah Hutchison summarized Paul’s conviction so beautifully, when they penned: “Nothing separates us from the Love of God!”

Duff shared Paul’s conviction and made it the watchword of his life and his ministry.

Indeed, whether administering the sacraments or engaging in casual conversation with a stranger, Duff could depend on the love of God to surround and drive the ministry he offered to every person he met.

In our lesson from John’s Gospel we hear Jesus’ reassuring words to his disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my father’s house there are

many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going.”

Did his disciples realize that Jesus was inviting them to look beyond their mortal life to a life they already enjoyed in God that transcended anything they could possibly imagine, a life that they would one day experience in its fullness?

They were barely aware of its presence, though they had occasionally caught glimpses of it in their travels with Jesus, and despite Thomas’s hasty protest, they did know the way to the place where Jesus was going; they just needed to be reminded from time to time that they did.

Our brother Duff knew the way, and he did everything he could to follow if faithfully.

And it has brought him to the joys of heaven.

I think, when all is said and done, that our brother Duff would want us to know that, free from the ravages of the disease that took him from us so suddenly, he now dwells in perfect safety.

What he only glimpsed in his extensive travels with Jesus, he now sees in its fullness, face to face; he now knows, even as he is known.

Jesus, the Christ of God, has taken Duff to himself, as he promised, and has ushered him into a realm of infinite possibilities, a wondrous dwelling-place where he can keep on going “from strength to strength”, as the Prayer Book so eloquently puts it, “in the life of perfect service in [God’s] heavenly kingdom”.

Thanks, Duff!

“You done good!”

You showed us the way.

Thanks be to God!

--The Rev. Bill Wieland