

As darkness falls on Saturday April 20th, many Episcopal Churches recognize that Jesus has passed from death into life through the celebration of the Easter Vigil. The service begins with the lighting of the new fire- the fire that was put out on Good Friday when Jesus died on the cross is now lit and the procession is led from outside the church into the church by the Paschal Candle. The Paschal Candle symbolizes, among other things, the light that went before the people of God during the exodus in the wilderness. The light that shone to remind the people that God was with them, always. There was no time dark enough that God was not present, leading them onward. At the Easter Vigil, the person carrying the newly lit Paschal Candle stops three times and sings out “The light of Christ” to which the congregation responds “Thanks be to God.”

Jim is now part of the light of Christ, to which we respond: Thanks be to God. I can just imagine Jim in younger years carrying the Candle into the dark sanctuary with his face lit with the light of new life in Christ and singing out in his beautiful voice: “The light of Christ”. A reminder to us that Christ is the light of the world and the darkness cannot overcome it. Ever. And Jim is now part of that light.

One of the Scriptures often read at funerals is from Paul’s Letter to the Romans, chapter 8. In that passage Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Another reminder that whether we are alive or we have died, we are with God and God is with us. A reminder to us who remain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come – nothing at all in all of creation can separate us from the love of God. We can worry ourselves to death – literally or figuratively- or we can trust in our God who time and time again reminds us that we are loved and at death we will be reunited with God for all eternity.

As someone who used his many gifts and talents in ways that benefitted this community and the wider world, some of which Daun related to you, Jim was a light to the world. A man of dignity who lived what he believed. As a Marine, Jim exemplified their motto: *Semper Fidelis*- Always Faithful. And I’m sure you’ve seen the billboards that remind us of their values: Commitment. Honor. Being a Marine is a way of life, in uniform or retired. Jim integrated the values of his time serving and his faith. The values were not incompatible but rather complimented each other in a richer and deeper life of love of God and love of neighbor while expecting the best from everyone. We all are the better for knowing him and seeing his witness. We will miss him.

The readings for today are ones that evidence Jim’s faith and his relationship with God. Jim had confidence that a place was ready for him at his death- the many dwelling places that Jesus refers to in the Gospel of John. Like Thomas, many of us have asked what is the way, and in fact, how can we human beings know the way? We do know that God’s ways are not our ways, so how can we mortals put our hands around what lies ahead for us at death. Jim, I think, like Thomas, found comfort in trusting Jesus to provide everything that Jim needed, both during his life and now in his eternal rest. We can look to Jim’s life to see evidence here and now of what a Christian life looks like, trusting in God to provide a dwelling place of rest and peace for eternity.

In Psalm 46, we start by acknowledging that God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in trouble. Because of this, we do not need to fear though the mountains shake and the waters of the sea roar and foam. Trusting in God we can relax and do our part to make God’s kingdom present on earth. And we can be still and know that God is God and we rest within his loving arms, today and always. Amen.