

Even when we know death is coming, the exact time it happens is a surprise. Jim had become increasingly constrained physically by his illness yet managed to remain engaged with the world and with those who helped him and those who loved him to the end. The long, slow decline was hard for us to see. I can only imagine how hard it must have been for Jim. Not how anyone imagines the last years of their life.

One of the gifts we have from Jim is the example he set in these last years at Wellbrooke. A wonderfully appointed room with things he loved around him. A place to visit where you always felt welcome. A place that reflected who Jim was by the things he chose to have with him. He was surrounded by people who cared for him as a person and not simply a patient. Jim looked forward to Communion as long as he was able to respond. Jim was a gift to those who brought Communion and to the others who helped him. He remained anchored in life and not focused on the inevitable end.

One of Jim's gifts was that as he knew life was changing in terms of his ability to be independent, he chose to offer his tangible goods to others- be it Fostoria, Waterford, art, furniture and collectibles. He passed on to others the things he had loved and enjoyed with the hopes that they would find beauty and comfort in those items. How gracious and generous! Jim understood that none of us has life in ourselves but rather we are alive in the Lord.

We opened this morning with words from the Book of Job and Paul's letter to the Romans. Comfortable words. Words of Scripture that can help us remember Jim's life with gratitude for being a part of his life, even if it was in small ways. Scripture that reminds us we are not alone, ever, but rather the Lord walks with us in life and in death, in joy and in sorrow. Jim now sees the Lord not as a stranger but as a friend and companion. Jim rests from his labors in the arms of a loving and compassionate God.

Jim now knows the spirit of the Lord in ways that we can only aspire to while we live. He continues to be a witness to how to live your life, even when that life doesn't go as planned. Jim counted on his relationship with God to be one of understanding that God is our refuge and our strength. That God is a very present help in our troubles. Therefore we should not fear even though we encounter challenges and disappointments. Jim rests secure in God who is always present if only we will be still and listen for God.

Jim now has a dwelling place with God and we can only imagine what that looks like. I trust that Jim is surrounded by those he loved that preceded him in death, that he has his favorite books and perhaps some opera or other classical music is playing to keep him company – as well as being with friends. We also remember Jim in the hymns chosen for this morning, and especially “How Great Thou Art” which we sang before the Gospel reading. Can't you hear Jim belting out “Then sings my soul, my Savior God to Thee: how great thou art, how great thou art”? Or “And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart!” Jim is now filled with joy and at home in the Lord. We will be with him once again when it is our turn to leave this life. Jim is waiting for us with open arms and open heart.

We will end this part of our celebration of Jim's life with “Morning Has Broken” – another hymn that celebrates the transition from life to death that Jim has made. His night has ended and his morning has come. May we celebrate with Jim that God's re-creation of Jim's world has come and Jim is once again whole in body, mind and spirit. Thanks be to God. Amen.