

ὁ λόγος παρακλήσεως  
Evening Prayer in Memory of Jack Gorsuch  
20 May 2017  
Epiphany Seattle

*In nomine...*

Our first reading today, from 1 Corinthians chapter 13, is written to a community that has lost its way on the spiritual journey. The purpose of signs like tongues or prophecy or knowledge is to help a community along on its spiritual journey. And the goal of the spiritual journey is, in a word, love. That's exactly the kind of thing that Jack Gorsuch liked to talk about.

Encountering the love of God is at the center of Jack's book, *An Invitation to the Spiritual Journey*. Our second reading today is from what is, to me, the most important chapter of that book. The chapter is called "Coming to God As We Are" and it begins by saying:

*If we don't live out of our own center, we live out of something or someone else's center. If we try to live from out of anything less than ourselves, we can't get far in the spiritual life because we pass before the face of the Divine One like strangers. We bring nothing genuine for God to love, and there is nothing authentic we present for transformation. If we are unwilling to reveal ourselves as we are to God or even to ourselves, we remain hollow.*

This haunts me! Does it speak to you, to? Jack is challenging me right where I am ripe for growth.

The spiritual journey is one that requires the veneer to come off. The spiritual journey makes status irrelevant and striving unimportant. The spiritual journey requires that we cast aside our polite prevarications and begin to figure out *who* we really are. Because only then do we become *alive* to the possibility of *transformation*.

And that is good news, says Jack. The spiritual journey will not begin *someday* when we get our lives figured out. The spiritual journey doesn't depend on us meeting a certain standard of thought or behavior. The spiritual journey lies precisely in our capacity to bring *who we are*, here and now, *before* God to be loved *by* God.

Jack Gorsuch has a long, deep history at Epiphany and in the Diocese of Olympia. He served this parish for 19 years, a calm and steady presence during times of intense change. Jack nearly became Bishop of this Diocese: he was so well-regarded that it took eight ballots to decide between the two candidates. Ultimately, however, Jack decided that God was calling him elsewhere, to more interior pursuits.

I knew Jack only briefly, during his last few years in Bellingham. We would meet for lunch at the Asian Bistro near his house. Every conversation with Jack was an invitation to the spiritual journey. Doubt was met with confidence in the God who holds our doubts and our joys in love. Resentments and frustrations, both mine and his, were met with calm acceptance. One of the most memorable things Jack said to me was, “Yes, God’s a real stinker sometimes.”

Are those the wise words for which you want to be remembered at your memorial service? That was Jack: that was authenticity. That was trust in a God who invites us to speak the truth as we see it.

God is indeed the one who meets us where we are. God is the one who can handle our upsets, rejoice in our happiness, and love us in our unbelief. God invites us to tell the truth as we see it – whether or not what we’re saying is fair – or even particularly pious. The truth as we see it is our experience, our genuine offering of self before God, and God asks of us nothing more or less than that.

Jack and Bev loved their life in Bellingham and their proximity to their daughter, Anne, in Vancouver. They began making plans to move to Seattle, but Bev’s stroke upended their lives. Jack regrouped with amazing agility and made new plans. Even as he mourned the loss of his home, his sporty VW, and the opportunity to live near his friends in Seattle, Jack was clear in his priorities. He adored his wife and daughters. Jack was going to take care of Bev and be near his girls.

After Jack moved away from Bellingham and began putting together his new life in Milwaukee, we emailed from time to time. In every message, I saw clearly that Jack’s love for Bev remained steadfast and deep even as he struggled with the grief of losing her to Alzheimer’s. He spoke of

a depth and an essence that remained in Bev even as her biology betrayed her. He spoke of her awareness of decline and her frustration. Her body was present, but her mind was clouded. Jack insisted the true Bev was still there, deep inside.

Jack embraced his own weakness and despair: these are part of the journey. Jack embraced the struggles of his beloved Bev: these are part of the journey. In all these things Jack rested in a deeper reality of goodness and love, that reality the church likes to refer to as God.

Now Jack has joined the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us in faith. Jack no longer sees only as in a mirror, dimly. He no longer knows only in part. Jack has passed beyond such limiting questions as “where” and “how.”

Bev remains in Milwaukee, struggling with dementia. Who knows? Perhaps in her essence Bev is already peeking over the threshold into the next reality as she loses her connection with this one. As I think about Jack and Bev and our Christian hope, I wonder if the two of them perhaps already enjoy even closer fellowship *now* than *before*. Because even as prophecies cease and tongues fade away, as bodies die and minds darken, three things remain: faith, hope, and love. And the greatest of these is love.

For each of us a spiritual journey is underway. The invitation to which Jack pointed still stands. We are invited to pursue love, to shower our affection upon one another, and to honor those who suffer among us. Like Jack we are invited to place our trust in the sure, unshakable, and eternal love of God.