

# Sermon for Jim Braden

January 14, 2017

Today, Isaiah speaks of a feast and good wine, and everyone who knew Jim Braden, know he enjoyed a good feast. He enjoyed good food, but he loved being in the company of others. I certainly knew this about him, he enjoyed talking with others - telling stories, but also listening. Yesterday, Margie said that the first thing he always asked upon meeting someone was, "What is your name?"

Whenever he went out to eat and a server came to his table, he asked his or her name. Jim loved people. Cards and letters the family received talked about how kind and caring he was. Growing up, his son Greg remembers his father giving a woman rides to church when she was no longer able to drive - even to the sunrise Easter service. Jim took care of others because he loved them - all of them.

As a state legislator in Kansas, he had occasions to meet heads of state - even President Ford, and Margie said she was amazed that this farm boy from Kansas was as at-ease with them as he was the man fixing his flat tire - and he had a lot of flat tires because when it came to tires he was cheap. His son told me that once Jim bought four retreads before leaving on a family trip only to have one of them fail a little over an hour from home and another very soon after that. What surprised

me about this story was that he was carrying two spare tires! I guess that he means he was cheap AND knew the consequences of buying cheap tires.

As a businessman he prided himself on customer service, and a man of faith, he welcomed anyone and everyone who came through the doors of the church. Thinking back on how he greeted others, I think it was the fact that he respected everyone that made it so easy for him to be at-ease with heads of state. Jim could give you the impression you are as important to him as the President of the United States - and perhaps to him, you were.

Both our second reading, from the Revelation to John and our gospel reading, speak of dwellings. There are a couple of reasons I thought of Jim when I read these scriptures. The first and most obvious is the fact that Jim had two homes, one here and one in Kansas. Margie said that in their entire life together they always had two homes. Jim told me one day that he had always wanted a log cabin, so at some point along the way he had a log cabin as well. What was even more significant than having two homes though, was the fact that Margie said he moved comfortably from one home to the other.

When in the Revelation to John, he writes, a voice from the throne says, "See, the home of God is among mortals," I think this speaks to the reason Jim was able to move comfortably from one dwelling to the other. His faith was

important to him and he knew God was always with him. He prayed at meals and always made of point of attending church. And, as I said, he even made it possible for others to attend. Even when his memory began to fail and he could not tell you what he had eaten for lunch, he was able to recite the prayers and responses in our liturgy and sing hymns from memory. Of course, the true test of faith is not measured by attendance or saying grace before meals, it is how we treat others and we know how Jim responded to others.

When his son Greg rolled a vehicle, Jim's first response was, "You've got to be kidding!" But Greg said he was quick to recover and immediately asked if Greg was hurt. Jim later told Greg, it just took him a second to realize what a blessing it was that Greg was alive and well and that was what was important. Family and faith were what Jim treasured above all. Greg may have been best suited for ditch digging - that's what Greg said, but his brothers were true athletes and his sister was a dancer. Jim made a real effort to go to as many of their games, track meets, and dance recitals as he possibly could - taking time off work and traveling when necessary. Amy, his daughter, fondly remembers family camping, fishing, sailing, and travel. She even remembers being the tag along on hunting trips - freezing in the early morning hours and returning to enjoy a big breakfast. Jim, I was told, loved watching the world come to life in the early morning hours.

In the tribute on the inside cover of your bulletin, it mentions that "Jim was enthusiastic about his love of family, work, faith, flying, sailing, hunting, and traveling." In short, I'd say he was simply enthusiastic about life. Margie says she cannot remember a single day that he didn't wake up excited about going to work. I believe it is because he loved life and he loved people. Once he was unable to fly and unable to go to work, he seemed lost until he moved into the assisted living facility and was around more people.

He was, as people described him, easy going and thoughtful - from start to finish. In these past few months, he continued to ask people their name, he continued to go to church, and he continued to say thank you to anyone that assisted him. Having worked in healthcare prior to becoming a priest, I can tell you that makes a tremendous difference. It is surprising how many people fail to say thank you.

A doctor once told me that people die as they live, and that is often the case. Those who count their blessings do tend to remember to say thank you to those who help them and to the one who created them. I love the passage in which Jesus talks about going to prepare a place for his disciples because it teaches us the importance of hospitality. Jesus came not to be served, but to serve, and people like Jim Braden remind us just how important that is. His love for others gave him life - and his life continues in the hearts of those he touched.

I for one am thankful that I had the privilege of knowing Jim and I am grateful that in preparing for this celebration I had the opportunity to get to know, in part, more of his family. Their love for him was evident - and as one of his children said, "not one of us is at a loss for words." So I could go on and on sharing great stories and quotes about his adventures, getting stuck in his plane with his son-in-law and granddaughter on a hot day and so on. But let me say, his love of people and his love of telling a good story certainly lives on in them.

"Jesus said to his disciples, 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, and 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?' I can't help but think, Jim is now helping to prepare a place for each of us - and I imagine that when the time comes, he will greet us with a feast!

Let us pray.

Grant, O Lord, to all who are bereaved the spirit of faith and courage, that they may have strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience; not sorrowing as those without hope, but in thankful remembrance of your great goodness, and in the joyful expectation of eternal life with those they love. And this we ask in the Name of Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*