Funeral Homily for Karl Manger

In the Name of the One, Holy, and Living God.

As I've spoken with friends over the past days since Karl died, a question arose which I'd never considered before. How is it that Karl so far outlived the typical ALS diagnose to death time-frame? How did he live with that awful disease, not for usual 2 or 3 years, but for 16 years? There may have been medical or genetic factors involved that we'll never know. But I believe that he lived as long as he did in no small part because he was determined to live with every fiber of his sometimes stubborn being. And he was determined to live –and to live as fully as possible – because he loved life so much.

He loved the garden in which he died – itself full of the beauty and energy of life. He loved good food and lively conversation which many of us were blessed to share with him. He loved the earthy pottery and elegant art that filled his house, and the shows where he could see more of what creative people were up to this year. He loved movies, new and old, and he loved his faithful, dog, Fredericka.

Karl's love of life was present, I'd say, even in his exacting, sometimes exasperating desire that tasks be done in a certain way and things in his home kept just so. That was partly about trying to control whatever he could in life – because so much of life was out of control from him. But I believe that desire was also grounded in the hope that managing everything with the detailed care he did would make living a life of beauty and joy actually *possible* in the very challenging circumstance in which he lived.

Among all the things Karl loved, music had a special place as today's service demonstrates. The many fabulous hymns we are singing were all Karl's choices. Singing, of course, takes breath which may be one reason Karl wanted the story of the Dry Bones from the prophet Ezekiel [i] to be today's first Scripture. He'd taken joy over the years in giving voice to the earthy energy in this text when reading it at the Great Vigil of Easter here at Christ Church.

The story, you'll recall, tells how Ezekiel, directed by God, prophesies to a valley of dry, dead bones, and they come together, bone to bone. They are covered with muscle and skin – but they remain lifeless until breath, Spirit, *Ruach* [ii] arrives. It is only when the Divine breath enters them that they stand on their feet, once again alive. Singer that he was, Karl knew how essential breath is for music – and life. And perhaps he also longed for a day when he could stand again on his own feet without assistance. Is it fanciful to imagine that at this very moment Karl, fully alive, is standing with no external support, drawing deep breaths to join the anthems of the choir around God's throne? I don't think so.

In the Christian tradition, images of a heavenly choir come largely from the Book of Revelation, out of which our second reading comes, and it's a text which points toward Karl's own sense about the Divine.

As best I know, I was the only of his occasional dinner companions who was also a priest, so it happened that our conversations at times turned toward theology. He once told me that he didn't believe in the God he'd taken from the Baltimore Catechism of his childhood in the Roman Catholic Church; an image of God which a Roman Catholic nun friend aptly calls God as the marionette master in the sky, controlling all that happens on earth, good and ill.
If you'd lived 16 years with a debilitating, terminal disease you'd likely not believe in such a God. If you've endured any of the other hard knocks life deals out, as most of us have, you might not believe in such a God either. I certainly don't.

Karl was more likely to talk of God as that within each of us that is life-affirming and loving. Now, as a priest, that's not all that *I* would want to say about God. But Karl's sense of the Divine dwelling within resonates with the image of God we heard in today's text from Revelation which speaks of the God who makes a *home among mortals, [and] dwells with them as their God* [iii] – "Thou in me dwelling and I one with Thee," as we just sang. [iv] That sense of the divine dwelling within was, I'd hazard, a source of Karl's love for life in this world. He was less sure that the God dwelling within mortals here and now would also raise them to renewed life on the other side of death. Perhaps he is now discovering that what he didn't dare hope for is actually true.

Among the key ways God dwells among mortals in *this* life is through acts of loving service, and that may explain Karl's choice of Gospel text – the foot-washing account from John, a story that embodies so much of where and how God was active and present in Karl's life.
At the Last Supper, Jesus shows that loving service is the heart of what he is about when, contrary to every cultural expectation, he washes his stunned disciples' feet.
And to be sure that they don't miss the point – as his followers, to our shame, so often have done – he goes on to say: *You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.* [v]

Karl followed Jesus example in his work at Jewish Family Services *where,* as his obituary says, *his compassion and dedication left a lasting impact on the community he served.* During the years I knew him, he did bookkeeping for a small business whose owners were friends. In recent times, he gave space in his home to a person without a home.

But, of course, for much of the last 16 years, the shoe was on the other foot; or to unmix the metaphor, the feet being washed, both symbolically and sometimes literally, were Karl's feet. And the divine servant love dwelt in all those who cared for him: the homemakers who helped Karl with physical and housekeeping needs on a daily basis; Karl's family, and the many friends and helpers who cooked meals, gave rides to appointments, took him to concerts and movies, worked in the garden he loved, and supported him in other ways too many to name.

It wasn't always easy. Sometimes Karl made it harder than it needed to be. But the loving service so many gave over the years is another reason Karl lived as long as he did. I'm sure that if he'd ever had to leave his beautiful, beloved home for an institution, he would have lasted only a very short time. As we commend Karl today to the God of loving service, we also commend all those who made the life that he so much loved rich and full – and just plain *possible*. You have been the hands and feet and heart of God, the presence of the Holy One who gave Karl his passion for life.

There's much, much more that could be said of Karl and of God and of the Divine life and love present in his life in so many ways and so many people, love known and love unknown, as we will sing in our final hymn. [vi] I hope you will continue to share with each other your stories about him, perhaps when we gather later after the service. But I will stop now and let the music Karl chose do the rest; so much of what needs to be said is already there.

Rest in peace, Karl, rise in glory, and join us in singing God's praises.
Amen.

The Rev. Jack Zamboni
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[i] Ezekiel 37:1-14
[ii] *Ruach* is the Hebrew word that can be variously translated as *breath*, *wind*, or *spirit.*
[iii] Revelation 21:3
[iv] "Be Thou my Vision" in *Hymnal 1982* # 488, v. 2.
[v] John 13:13-15
[vi] "My Song is Love Unknown in *Hymnal 1982* # 458.