

**SERMON PREACHED AT THE OCCASION OF THE BURIAL OF
THE RIGHT REVEREND CHARLES DUVALL**

*II Bishop of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast
October 13, 2020*

*Preached by The Right Reverend Russell Kendrick
IV Bishop of the Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast*

[the printed sermon contains the creative use of grammar and shorthand that helps the preacher]

Come Holy Spirit, come. Come as the fire & kindle in our hearts the love of the Lord Jesus.

Come as the dove & bring to our lives the peace of God.

Come as the wind & blow away those clouds of doubt & uncertainty

which would keep us from following Jesus Christ as Lord & Savior. Amen.

I wonder how many times Bishop Duvall began a sermon by praying that prayer.

I know my south Alabama accent sounds nothing like his South Carolina accent...

but I wonder if when I prayed it...I wonder if u might have caught a whisper of Charles' familiar voice

We are here today to give thanks to God for how his voice....& even more...

how his life.... has resonated with our lives....and will continue to do so.

Of all the preachers who could be here to preach....I'm humbled...and I am a bit nervous....

when I last spoke with Charles he reminded me he had asked me to preach & he quipped

"I'm going to have them leave one of my hearing aids in my ear so I can listen to what u say."

I went on and asked him...."So help the preacher out...what do you want me to say?"

he answered..."I taught you what to preach.....so just give them that....."

So here is what Charles Duvall taught me.....

he taught me grace...grace is what he gave me....and grace is what I hope to give to you.....

And he gave us grace in a number of ways....first of all...there were his stories.....

There may be some who felt he took liberties with the stories he told.....

but I think he was something of a medieval mystical and ancient rabbi

on whom God bestowed the gift of a sanctified imagination.....

and goodness...he had quite the imagination

His way with words was sheer genius....he could turn a phrase.....tell a story....

and he could lay down his SC accent just when he needed to.....

in a way that would tickle our ears.....touch our hearts.....and give us grace...

In the words of the old hymn...*I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus & his glory, of Jesus and his love....I love to tell the story b/c I know 'tis true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else could do.*

Charles loved to tell the story.....& there were so many he told.....
My favorite is one he told when he visited the church I served in Newnan....after he retired
it was about what Charles imagined was the first sound of creation.....
that just before God said Let there be light.....God laughed.....
It was the laughter of sheer delight & joy in what God was about to do....
God laughed so much...Charles told us...that God's eyes started to leak...
laughter.....he told us laughter is the sound whenever grace is near...
& when Charles told it....he laughed too...

So many stories...Ruth & Noah, Moses & Mary.....Peter & Paul.....
but every story would always point us to the one story...
the story...of God's redemptive love for us....his stories gave us grace.

But it was not just the stories he told... that gave us grace....it was also the life he lived

To this day....in a way....he is still my Bishop...he laid his hands on my head to ordain me
he put this cross over my neck when I was made a Bishop....
he laid his hands on my wife's head to confirm her....& he baptized my daughter.....
he gave us grace in the rituals of the church...& he gave me grace on a day I needed it.

While I was in CPE at seminary....I baptized a man who was a drug dealing conman
who was also probably going to die...though it was not imminent....in other words...
it was not the emergency in the prayer book that permits lay people to baptize

3 months later I was in the diocesan office for an interview with the Commission on Ministry & Bishop Duvall.
It was an interview for me to become a "candidate" for holy orders.....It was a big deal.

Out of the blue....someone on COM asked me about that decision.....
& implied that in doing so.....I had just possibly violated the canons.....

I was stunned....I fumbled & stumbled around.....& finally these words fell from my lips...
"I may be wrongbut if I am going to be wrong...I choose to err on the side of grace"
There was what felt like an eternal silence...which was broken by Charles who remarked
"& from my reading of the Bible.....u are in very good company for it" & laughed

He gave me grace...& in my opinion.....he gave an entire diocese this kind of grace.

For 20 yrs he served the people of CGC....& Charles accomplished a lot in those 20 years
he started new churches....moved offices of the diocese....he navigated doctrinal conflict
& he raised money for the diocese...that set us on a firm foundation for the next 20 yrs

He accomplished many things but his greatest achievement is how he cared for his flock
he was a very good shepherd....the kind of shepherd who loved his sheep
& did not want to lose even one of his sheep.

the kind of shepherd that led us to the still waters of grace.....

& even when he disagreed with the direction of his church.... he did not run away
he stayed put.....he tried his best to keep the flock together

And like a good shepherd....he even tried to set a table of unity with his enemies

he loved us...but you know....that kind of love.....has a way of leaving you with wounds
& Charles carried a few deep wounds.....

Our diocese was barely 10 years old when he was ordained Bishop....

we were born by a merger of 2 diocese....a blended family of Alabamians and Floridian
trust was fragile.....us vs. them.....and the past memories were still very much alive....

Charles walked into our midst & greeted us..."friends & neighbors" and he never stopped calling us that....

In the last few years, I have picked up the use of that same greeting

About a year ago, I asked Charles about the origin of that address,
he giggled....then, in his typical matter off act way...he replied,
"Well, I just thought----that's who we are supposed to be."

He gave us grace...in so doing we became one flock...CGC...we became friends/neighbors

And yet for all of us who were his friend & neighbor...

it pales to the love and grace he knew with those who were his family.

Nancy.....I do not recall many times....that you were not by his side.....

I have this lasting memory of a silver Buick [it always was a Buick?] driving up to the church...
and the two of you both hopped out.

You made a very good team....whether you were raising your children or raising your clergy

walking the neighborhood to figure out how to do that raising up.....or watching movies....

as Paula Ross said.....you were his first lady.....I bet you have a few stories you could tell too
63 years.....for better for worse....well done....thank you.

Nancy...Ted...Charles.....Anne.....all of you.....this hurts...but amidst the hurt....

I want you to try and hear what I am about to say.....

it hurts this bad.....because you have known the gift and power of love...

Today you are feeling the pain of a lifetime of love.....of many good memories.
so much so....as Charles would say...."love just fills you up until your eyes start to leak."

As you navigate the days ahead....remember that you are in the valley...called grief
It is a land where right & wrong...give way to simply doing the best you can
so ...laugh until you cry...and cry until you laugh.....
be gentle with yourselves... be gentle with each other.....

Charles loved you so much...that he will still continue to shape you
his values.....his wit...even his voice.....that lives on in you...
and while it will never be the same....he will continue to be around....

What Im trying to say is this....love is stronger than death.....love is stronger than death
because of that.....Charles will continue to show up...it may happen at the strangest times
and suddenly...it is like he is right there with you....so much so that love starts pouring down your cheeks.

I love to tell the story 'Twill be my theme in glory...To tell the old, old story Of Jesus & his love

Charles told us the story.....he taught it...he preached it & he lived it...
he was A good shepherd....b/c he knew THE good Shepherd...who loses no one

That's really why we are here...to remember God's story for us.....
the story of God's eternal absolute love...given to us in Jesus...
It is in the power of that perfect love we know as Easter...that again I can say this...
love is stronger than death....and in that love....Charles has been gathered up..& raised up....& he is with God.

And if you will lend me your imagination....and forgive me for a bit of heresy...
Charles was known to quip that as a shepherd.....he would not wear a mitre.....
so I am not sure what he will do if God offers him a crown or halo...

Just imagine for a minute...that the man who loved to tell stories....
is now in the company of all those characters he gave us.....Ruth....Peter....Moses...
don't you just think he has them all gathered around.....and he is telling them a few stories.....
"Let me tell you about the time I met the prettiest young girl named Nancy...."

I love to tell the story 'Twill be my theme in glory...To tell the old, old story Of Jesus & his love

Charles told us the story of Jesus and his love....he lived the story.....and we are better for it
Set let us be thankful for that.....and let us go forth and honor his life.....
by doing our part...to give the world what he gave us
to tell the story.....to live the story....to give people the gift of grace
let's do what we can to make this world.....a place where everyone...is a friend and neighbor