

**Memorial Service for Randy Valz<sup>1</sup> – April 30, 2008  
St. John's Episcopal Church, Charleston, WV**

***The Rev. Kent Higgins***

Randy Valz was a Virginian and an Episcopalian. And that says rather a lot about the man.

He came from a state where THE University is well-known (and from which he graduated); where THE High School is equally defined (and from which I graduated). Virginians even say THE Diocese, and everyone knows whereof they speak. It is a well-ordered world.

I'd like to talk about Randy and his life, at least the portion that I knew, not as a eulogy, for as you probably know, the Episcopal Church doesn't encourage eulogies at funerals or memorial services, but as a homily. And I'd like to reflect on Randy's life and the message of this service, which Randy planned for us. When he specified the readings and the psalms. I suspect he intended to convey a message to us all.

I came to know Randy late in his life, when the infirmities of age were closing in on him. He found it hard to sit through the full church service here, but he wanted to continue to receive communion, to receive the sacraments of the church, and so once a month, I would take the bread and wine consecrated at this altar to him, so that he could share in the Eucharistic meal which is central to Christian worship.

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<sup>1</sup> Randolph Mills Valz, Jr., 10/16/1914 – 4/25/2008

And so, at a time when you might not expect a person to start a new relationship, Randy and I shared prayers and worship together.

The man I came to know was conservative and traditional in many ways, not least with regard to his religion. And in that sense, he and I were rather a strange match.

There was a part of his church with which Randy disagreed – he thought the church was wrong in its consecration of Gene Robinson, something which I found, on the other hand, a natural extension of the ordination of women.

In the church in which Randy grew up, lay people did not bring communion – that was reserved for the clergy. So would he accept me instead of a priest?

I was a liberal visiting a conservative. A Democrat in the living room of a Republican. But you know, we were bound together by the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and in those recurring visits, we got to know each other.

I think Randy understood that when Jesus says to his disciples, “in my Father’s house are many mansions,” Jesus is saying that there is a place in the Kingdom for all of us, even Democrats! It is a way of saying that we may be surprised at the people who end up in heaven, for they will be people with whom we would not have associated here on earth.

Let me assure you that our surprise at seeing people like that in heaven is nothing when compared to their surprise at seeing you and me!

And Randy Valz understood that. His willingness to accept me was, partially, a matter of being polite. That comes from being a Virginian. But he was perfectly capable of making his position known, as he did to me, and then simply

moving on, because in the greater scheme of things, our differences were trivial, and our common bonds incredibly strong.

That ability to move on represents a living out of the commandment that we love one another as Jesus loves us. It represents an intentional focus on those things in life which are important. It acknowledges the lesson in the twenty-third psalm: "The Lord is my shepherd." It's a story told in the window over the high altar. It's a truth Randy believed. When we follow the same shepherd, we are sheep of the same flock. We are all in life together.

And what is fundamentally important is that Jesus Christ died on a cross and rose again, with the result that we all obtain life everlasting. It is that hope of salvation which we celebrate in this service.

So while we mourn the loss of our friend, of our father and grandfather and great-grandfather, we should know that he is not abandoned by the great shepherd. Even now, Randy is held safe in God's hands.

To Randy's family, let me say how much he loved you and how proud he was of you. His dining room was adrift in pictures, and newspaper clippings, and his conversation was full of who had done what. He grieved your losses and celebrated your successes.

His love of family and his sense of place within that family is represented in the church when we speak of the saints – those who have gone before us and those who will follow us – a great host of people united in their love of God.

This church – Randy's church – stands in testimony to the people who over the years have sat in the pews where Randy once sat, the pews where you now sit, in testimony to the people who have been fed for life's journey from this altar.

As Randy's physical world grew smaller, as we moved from communion in his living room, to his dining room, to the kitchen, and finally to his room at the nursing home, what burned at the center of his life, what illuminated his world was this combined love of God and love of the people of God. It is that love which we celebrate today.

So, as we miss Randy and mourn his passing, as surely we do and we will, remember what he understood, that there is a place in God's house for all mankind. Remember the psalm he chose – "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want." Remember the passage from Revelation – "They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more... For the Lamb shall feed them,... and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

God has opened to him a larger life, and God will open that life to us all.

That is the message Randy leaves for us, in this service and in his life. It is your task to carry that message out from this place and share it with others, in memory of Randy Valz and for the love of God.

*Amen.*