

## Keith Winkler

I remember when my father died way back in 1984.... And I remember thinking how much I loved Episcopal funerals. Of the Rites in our Book of Common Prayer, the Burial Rite to me is the most poignant... dare I say, the most beautiful... Why is that? At the death of one of our own, our liturgy prompts us to gather and celebrate, our grief notwithstanding. We sing hymns of praise; we pray prayers of hope; we anticipate joy, in spite of our grief.... A peculiar paradox, perhaps... certainly an irony.... Reflective of a life of irony and paradox. In the eyes of some, what we do is absurd.... But it is our legacy... It is our witness... That love and hope and life itself have more than conquered death, so much so that we gather to celebrate this day.... And perhaps conquer is not the word I want to use... because death is real, but death is a part of God's gracious order... So perhaps a better way to say it is... that even in the valley of the shadow of death, we know that God's love, the love that is real and tangible among us... We know that in love all manner of thing shall be well... To acknowledge that gift, and to practice that knowledge is what our lives of faith are all about.

But still... The front row just doesn't look right to me without Keith sitting right there.... brothers and sisters, the thing we celebrate this day is that Keith's legacy will never die.... His passion for the least among us, for prisoners and for the down and out; That passion will live on.... His love of his family and his friends and his church will live on... His welcoming and generous and gentle spirit will live on.... Love never dies.... Do you believe that? It is for us as people of faith to live in witness to that great mystery.... Love never dies.... And our vocation on this earth is to practice the art of love.

Our reading from John's gospel is a teaching on the means of love... the practice of love... Some have interpreted this passage as speaking about life after death... and certainly as Christians we believe that at our death life is changed not ended, that we continue to live in the love and care of God.... But this passage speaks of the means of love in the here and now... that we make sacred space for each other... that there are many rooms in God's house here and now... that is what we do as God's people... We make room for each other to live with dignity and in the knowledge that we have worth.... That we are loved, in short.

You have heard me say before... that the word for resurrection in scripture literally means to 'stand with dignity'... Our legacy as Christian folk is to practice the art of resurrection.... The art of welcome, the art of friendship... so that all

people may know that the love of God is not some abstraction... but that it is real and alive among us.

That is our brother's legacy... that he practiced the art of love in humility and grace and gentleness... making room for each of us and letting us know that love is real. One can't do any more than that in this life.

So let us, good people, carry on in the legacy of love... Let us stand for those who hunger and thirst for the love of God... and know this, our brother stands with us this day... and will stand with us always... because, dear friends of God... love never dies.