

REFLECTION

The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson
June 20, 2021

A Celebration of Life in honor of James Henry Conboy (1921 - 2021)

*He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat
Oh, be swift, my soul to answer, oh be jubilant, my feet
His truth is marching on*

You've got to wonder why certain people have certain favorite hymns. "I come with joy to meet my Lord, forgiven, loved and free" "Here I am, Lord. It is I, Lord. I have heard you calling in the night." "O let the Son of God enfold you, with his spirit and his love." "Shall we gather at the river, the beautiful, the beautiful river." Jim's favorite hymn is "My eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord."

James Henry Conboy, the man we all know to be kind and generous, honest and loyal, solid as a rock—was also—behind that welcoming smile and outstretched hand—a righteous and faithful soldier of the Lord. A fighter. Not easily giving up. Resilient. On the baseball field they called him "Red." In 36 years I never saw his Irish temper but maybe that's because I was smart enough not to make him mad. And that faith of his was strong enough to carry the rest of us along with him. Strong as a bull. Hands gripping a garden plow. Determined. How else to you think he made it to his 100th year and insured that Epiphany Church would make it to its centennial and beyond?

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(TRUMPET PLAYS THIS VERSE, SLOWLY)

For those of us wondering what life will be like without Jim Conboy at the helm, without Jim Conboy to steady the boat, without Jim Conboy to calm our fears...take another look at the Gospel appointed for today. It's the perfect Gospel reading. It's a Gospel of assurance that has an important truth to listen for,

- over the sounds of the waves of sadness
- over the winds of grief blowing in our faces,
- and over the swells that we fear threaten to swamp the boat.

Here we all in this boat. The storms of life come up quickly on us, inevitably, predictably— like an angry afternoon storm on the Chesapeake Bay on a hot summer afternoon. And we, we are left, hearts bounding, with sheer terror. But this Gospel story reminds us that no matter what the circumstances—the vicissitudes of life—even the death of our long-time leader and friend— Jesus is here. He always has been and always will be with us. He may seem asleep at times but he has never left the boat. And when we remember to call upon him—with prayers and or tears—it is He who calms the storm, who challenges us and changes our perspectives and sets us back on track, back at our tasks, back in our trust of God and one another. Jim built his life on this faith. And now is the time to remember.

*Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored
He have loosed the fateful lightening of his terrible swift sword
His truth is marching on*

Sing with me:

Glory, Glory halleluia
Glory, Glory halleluia
Glory, Glory halleluia
His truth is marching on

We are here to celebrate Jim’s life. We are also here to say “Thank you” and “Good-bye ” and “Rest in peace.” In our hearts and by the way we live our lives let us each give God thanks for the friendship, the leadership, the example of faith and the love we were so freely given. Loyal and honest friendship and love are gifts that once given can never be taken away.

*In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea
With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me
As he died to make men holy let us live to make men free
His truth is marching on*

AMEN