

SERMON
The Reverend Dr. Phebe L. McPherson
A Celebration of Life of
The Reverend Carl B. Harris
July 10, 2021

It was just a few years ago that Carl and I ventured out on the high seas in my small Boston Whaler. Well, it wasn't exactly the high seas. I picked him up at the Annapolis dock and we headed out toward the mouth of the Bay. Carl loved the water. He spent many years with his friend, Bob Stange, crewing aboard Bob's 40-foot sailboats. My little turn-key wasn't much of a substitute but I loved that I could depend on Carl to want to go. This particular occasion was our last. After we passed the harbor marker, I took a good hard look at the *soul* entrusted to me—that's what captains call their guests aboard—"souls." The swells were deep. We were bouncing hard. I looked, and for the first time I saw that Carl was frailer than I remembered. Immediately, I was afraid I had put him in some sort of jeopardy or danger. The sun was too hot. The brackish water was whipping against our faces. I put up the Bimini to protect him. Then the winds picked up even more and I realized that this was not going to be a pleasure cruise. I turned and headed to the Severn River where the waters were calmer. But to get there, we headed straight into the wind, and then, the black strap that held the Bimini broke. The Bimini stayed in place, but I was afraid for my "guest soul." I looked hard at Carl to assess the situation and saw an image that I've not yet forgotten.

Carl leaned toward the bow of the boat where he faced the wind directly, intentionally. The cold water sprayed his face. Schools of fish broke the waters. Birds dove to catch them in a frenzy. The wind-swept clouds moved at warp-speed. Carl closed his eyes to take it all in, the sounds, the feel of it all—and smiled—that quiet smile of his. When he opened his eyes I saw a look that I have seen before in him many times. His beautiful soft brown eyes really were a window into his soul. Carl was fully present in the moment, Sight, sound, smell, taste— every one of his senses was engaged. He was taking it all in and loving it—this awe-inspiring human experience! I could also see he was *outside the moment*—and in touch with something much bigger.

Teilhard de Chardin wrote:

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience.

We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

Many of us have heard these words from this French Jesuit priest and theologian and for most of us, there is something about this idea that resonates at a very primordial level.

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Something in us knows, deep in the gut or the heart, that we are made of more than just the sum total of our thoughts, feelings, and life situations. We have a sense of being larger or more infinite than just our little “me.” I never saw this truth more clearly than in the eyes of Carl Harris. I have always been intrigued when Carl referred to himself as “just a little dark fella.” I think, I know — that, ironically, this comment was part of his connectedness—a joke that only those with the same awareness understand. Not unlike a secret handshake. Or a wink. An acknowledgment, *soul to soul. Deep speaking to deep.* “Just little ol’ me.”

Did you ever stop to consider that Carl’s humor, his quips and jokes were an expression of his joy—his trust in God and his unrelenting enjoyment of his soul’s human experience. *Silly. Serious, and Sacred.* The fullness of life is expressed in all these ways. Carl could be goofy—just as Carli said. Those with an awareness of the big picture— *we come from God and are on a return journey to God*—can laugh at the vicissitudes of life. It has been said, “Pleasure makes us smile. Happiness makes us laugh. And, joy can bring tears to our eyes.” I’m told that when Carl covered for me at Epiphany he would ask at the end of the service, as I always do, “Are there any birthdays or anniversaries to celebrate together?” But would add, “ Or any parolees?” Smiles and laughter help build community, and trust and joy give reassurance and connection.

Carl could be serious. He was dependable, just as Dan said. Carl was there for people when the going got tough. In this human experience we are share, Carl knew when to

speak and when to be silent. Carl was also generous. But he never let on about the sacrifices he made and the support he so freely offered.

Carl was in touch with the sacred— as we all know from his life among us as a priest and pastor. Presiding at sacramental events too numerous to recount and visiting those in the hospital every week. Getting to know more people than he could even remember. A few days ago Tracy recalled, “It was embarrassing. Growing up, people would always come up to him wherever we were and speak with him as if they were old friends. ‘Who was that?’ she would ask. ‘I don’t know.’ Carl would answer.” Another of his winks—a *soul* to *soul* joke.

Bruce and I were talking about Carl the other morning and we both agreed that there are two priests of our generation, in our circle, who we most admire and wish to emulate. Barney Farnham and Carl Harris. Why? Because Barney had a passion for the Gospel — he loved Jesus. He translated that love into a passion for social justice. Carl had a passion for the Gospel—he loved Jesus. He translated that love into a passion for pastoral, loving-care for all people. He was the best, most dedicated, most reliable, most compassionate pastor ever. The best of the best. A good Good Shepherd, in the likeness of Christ, himself.

Carl was chosen by God and the Church to care for all God’s people. He accepted and enjoyed every minute of this sacred privilege and responsibility with humor and seriousness—with the fullness of his life.

We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

I saw again, how much Carl loved every one of you and enjoyed his adventure on earth the last time we talked—last Friday. He was surrounded by the hustle and bustle of his family—his wife, Tomi and daughter, Tracy. Lucky, the beagle, was under his bed. Dan had been there just a few days earlier. His grandchildren and son-in-law were in and out taking care of this and that. Carl was fully awake and gave me an hour and a half gift of what could be called, “harvesting memories.” He started with his early childhood—his mother dying of Huntington’s disease, his father wanting him to take over the family

business. His growing up years at St. Bartholomew's, Ten Hills. He was a teenager whose life was influenced and shaped by clergy, Was it John Mount? Jack Malpas? Can you see him walking to church every Sunday. Watching and listening. Learning. Being called to the ministry. Living in New York City at the General Theological Seminary. In 1968 he went to the Poor People's March on Washington and stood just an arms-length from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. He waited to get married. Met the wonderful Tomi. And was blessed with the gift and joy of children and grandchildren. He served churches in Maryland. Built St. Andrew's, Mayo. Served as Rector at St. Stephen's for 25 years. And in retirement—Ascension, Westminster. And then, he blessed Epiphany with his humor and support for 20 years. He said to me, "You know, I just like people." I said, "I do too, but you like more of them than I do." And people loved Carl in return. Is there anyone who doesn't love Carl?! After a few silent pauses at the end of our "harvesting" Carl smiled that quiet, joyful smile of his. I offered a favorite prayer, "Support us, O Lord, all the day long..."

Carl always saw something more in each of us and found joy and peace in just being part of it all.

A spiritual being having a human experience.

As I look out on this congregation I want to say to Carl, "Yes, Carl. We are all parolees in need of your blessing," But more than this, I want him to know that we all give thanks to God for him in our lives.

*Carl, I know you loved this human experience and didn't want to go,
but we rejoice that you have broken the bonds and are now free.*

From our souls to yours—

May God bless and keep you, now and forever.

AMEN.