

01.04.2020

In memoriam + Paul Nuckols +
John 14:1-6; Revelation 7:9-17

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I'll never forget Paul. He is just one of those special people who will forever stay with me. As his pastor, it has been my joy and privilege to serve Paul these last six years. And more recently, I always looked forward to our visits together each month. Since he stopped driving, I would come see him at his home. I'd take him Sunday's bulletin, share God's Word with him, and bring Paul the gift of Holy Communion.

And just like I'll never forget Paul, I'll never forget the first time I came to see him at King's Bridge retirement community. I thought, *Wow, Paul! Nice digs!* It seemed like a beautiful place. As soon as you walk up to it, you notice the drive-up valet service. Then, as you step into the lobby, you see the topiaries. And riding up the elevator, I was impressed by its mahogany paneling. It really seemed as if Paul had found a place to call home.

But y'know, as nice as all that was—even up to the end—it always felt like something was missing. That home that he now had could never truly compare to the home he'd once made with Mary Ann. On January 11—just seven days from now—it will be four years since we met here for Mary Ann's funeral. And for those few years without her, Paul's house—no matter the mahogany, or the topiaries, or the valet—could never be home. For home is where the heart is, and Paul's heart—his one true love—was gone. What made his home of 54 years so beautiful was his beautiful bride.

Now, you and I knew and loved Paul very much. And one of the things that made him so easy to love was his humility. He was one of the kindest, gentlest people I've ever had the pleasure of knowing. I remember when, talking about those years of wedded bliss, Paul said with a big smile on his face that he'd "married up."

But I wonder if what made Paul so humble was his awareness of his standing before Almighty God. He knew that our Lord demands perfection, and Paul never forgot his weaknesses and limitations with Mary Ann, nor his faults and failures when it came to God. And it was Paul's need for a Savior that kept him humble.

You see, despite having Mary Ann—as much of a tremendous gift and blessing as she was to him—Paul would've still been missing something even more important, if he didn't have that Savior. But Paul indeed has that Savior in Jesus Christ. Y'know, God also thought there was something not right about *His* own house—something or *someone* was missing. Forget valet, or mahogany paneling, or topiaries, God has streets paved with gold, pearly gates, a great throne, a river as clear as crystal, not to mention the tree of life—but even with all of that, it just didn't feel like home yet. Because God's heart, His beloved, His own dear child Paul wasn't there. Nor could Paul—or anyone for that matter—ever be at home with God if left in sin. For God is holy and holiness can't be in the same room as sin.

But what if that sin could be taken away? God came down to where Paul was, and entered into the flesh of Jesus Christ—that's what this Christmas season is about, after all. God took on human form, He became like Paul, to take his place. He did this so that—even though *God* was without sin—He could become Paul's sin for him. And in Jesus that's just what He did, taking that sin and nailing it to a cross. There, it could be crucified, eliminated, never to be a threat again. No more would Paul be shut out, but rising to new life with His risen Savior Jesus Christ, Paul is now welcomed to His heavenly home.

Just listen to what Jesus has to say about it, "Let not your hearts be troubled," He says. "Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also." Jesus has prepared a place for Paul, and He has come again and taken Paul to be with Himself, that where Jesus is Paul may be also. And it's there that Paul and Mary Ann have been reunited, enjoying their new home together with God in heaven forevermore.

Want to see what they're up to? God's Word this morning gave us glimpse. Listen again to this wonderful word picture: "behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and people and languages,

standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" . . . Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Can you just picture Paul and Mary Ann in that big crowd? Can you make them out in that great multitude? Because that's where they are. Safe and sound. At home again. But don't just stop there—look for your own face in that scene. Because that's a real depiction of heaven. Can you find yourself there one day among those that are sheltered by our Lord's presence? Christ Jesus has prepared the way for you, He has gone to prepare a place for you too, and one day He will come again to bring you to Himself. When you believe that He—and He alone—is the way and the truth and the life, that nobody comes to the Father except through Him, when you see your need for Him and trust Him as your only Savior just like Paul did, then He guarantees you a spot in His Father's house. Can you see yourself yet? Because that's where you'll be! All dressed in white, waving a palm branch in victory. That's you alright, right next to Paul and Mary Ann.