

*May we celebrate life where we find it. In the name of the triune God, amen.*

It is an honor to be the one to bring words to our hearts' thoughts and prayers as we celebrate the life and witness of Thomas William Donaldson. I am also mindful of Cherry's words to me a few weeks back: "No longwinded preaching. I don't like longwinded preaching." I'll do my best Ms. Cherry.

James and Martha: you have been so very intentional and so very care-filled these last few weeks to be sure that your father is given the honor and dignity he so richly deserved. Your love for him is abundantly evident and I have no doubt that he is as pleased as can be to watch you live your lives full of integrity and truth and love.

It is said that when someone has Parkinson's related dementia their family must mourn twice: once when they realize their loved one no longer recognizes them and again when the loved one moves from this life to Life Beyond. While I see that being true with so many families who must walk along side a loved one with Parkinson's related dementia, I also know it's true that there is a sweetness in knowing that journey is complete and with that completeness is a return to fullness of life and love and connection. Tom is not physically with us, but his spirit is once again complete and vibrant. "So it is, says the Spirit, for they rest from their labors."

Cherry, if I could, I would not use any words today. I would weave you a tapestry. A tapestry that you can mount in front you and reflect on all your days until you are reunited with your Tom. The tapestry would contain all the images that fill you with love for your husband, all the images of how Tom was uniquely and wonderfully made, of all the adventures that brought you and he an abiding sense of the truth that you were made for love, and that your union was made for love, and your time together as husband and wife produced loved. Alas, I am not a weaver. Forgive me. But, I do strive to be a storyteller, a word smith. And so I will use the creative tools God gave me, even with brevity in mind, to weave you a tapestry for your soul to reflect on.

I said that Tom and Cherry's married life produced love. And while at the top of their offspring of love is Jamie and Martha, it is not just their children, but neighbors, friends, and faith community associates who are better off, who know a bit deeper and a bit broader what it means to walk with integrity and with dignity and with God's grace guiding and inspiring. We are all better for God having made Tom, and for God having given him to Cherry as husband, to Jamie and Martha as father, and to us as friends, colleagues and neighbors. When I sit down with couples who want the benefit of an Episcopal Church wedding, my first questions to them are "How will your union reflect the love of God? How will your marriage be an outward and visible sign of the love of God and the grace of God raining down on all? How will you be sacramental in the setting up of your home, family, vocation and civic participation? And then, when they looked starry-eyed and dazed by the enormity of the questions—"Geez, we just wanted to get married in a pretty church" "Geez, we just wanted a priest to make it official", "Gosh, we just thought it'd be cool to have a church wedding." Then I begin to describe life 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, even 70 years down the road. And I use the likes of Tom and Cherry, couples who figured out how to make their married life a vocation, how to let their spiritual journey cross over into their earthly journey. I talk about the essentials of what I see and what we all experience when the Toms and Cherrys of the world cross our paths: essential to Tom's life witness was the knowledge that we are all just walking each other home. As one of our favorite blessings here at Saint John's goes: because life is short and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts who travel this way with us, we should be swift to love and we should make haste to be kind. Tom was both swift and made haste. He was of love and he was kind. Jesus tells Thomas in the Gospel today that we know the way to where he-Jesus- is going, to the place where Jesus goes ahead to prepare a room for us. Thomas says, "Teacher, we have no idea where you're going. How do you expect us to know the road?" And then we hear those tender, yet commanding words of the Christ: I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Creator apart from me." In

other words, we are in fact just walking each other home, and if we want to help each other get there, we'll walk the same path, the same truth, and live a life as Jesus did. We'll watch and learn from Jesus, and then do the same. Turns out that what Jesus did while he traveled this road with us was all about respecting dignity, pulling people up to their best selves, insisting that everyone has a place at the table, that everyone has a room prepared for them. Jesus took seriously the prophet Micha's words that what God requires of us is that we do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God. Jesus operationalized that for us. Walked the walk, talked the talk, and then repeatedly, over and over again said "Come, follow me." "Follow my lead". Never, not once did Jesus say, 'I'll just wait until you have your act together and then we'll see about getting you in. Never, not once, did Jesus wait until those who were troubled, those who were sick, separated, scorned, misused or ignored were cleaned up and socially desirable before he healed them, embraced them, and include them in his circle. Never, not once did Jesus wait until someone was off the sin game before he loved them. He said: "Follow me", do as I do, walk as I do, speak as I do, love as I do. This Tom knew by heart. This Tom strived to do every day. Even when he felt he fell short of the glory of God, he started over and tried again to walk home, to help those he walked with to follow the road home. He sat each Monday afternoon with our brother Jim Angotti because he did not want Jim to be alone. He brought communion, fellowship, Christian friendship to our brother Jack Arnold because he didn't want Jack to be outside the fellowship of this faith community when Jack could not get here. He was faithful and dignified in his sacred tasks of ushering, reading scripture at worship, being an Eucharistic minister, participating in the men's breakfast group, and weekly Bible Study. He practiced charity to the best of his ability, he reached out to newcomers with a forthrightness that warmed hearts.

Tom would call my husband Mark every once in a while and ask him to come over to "straighten out his computer" for him. Each time Mark would sit down at Tom's computer he would explain to Tom that he really did not need all 5,682 programs, gadgets, apps, and "helpful"

system-checks he had downloaded. Mark would go about cleaning up Tom's cache, turning off background apps and programs, and zip, zap, zoom, Tom's computer was off and running at lightening speed again. "But, don't I need all those things to help my computer work better?" "Nope", says Mark, "you've got all the skill you need to do what you need to do inside you." Tom's response, every time, "You know, that's what I used to tell my coworkers and new hires. You don't need to go all fancy. Just work the program." How's that for a life lesson? You don't need to go all fancy, just work your program." Tom's version of: Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly. Tom's version of just follow Jesus.

As Presiding Bishop Michael Curry says, "I got one more thing to say, then I'll sit down." Martha read those beautiful words of Isaiah just a few minutes ago:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because God anointed me to preach good news to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, announce freedom to all captives, and pardon to all prisoners. God sent me to announce the year of grace and to comfort all who mourn  
A message of joy instead of languid spirit. A mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness, to display God's glory."

We read these words often at a funeral. And we most often mean them to be directed at those who mourn, at ourselves, really. But, as I hear them read this afternoon, I know they are about who Tom was about. They are about what it meant for Tom to live faithfully. And these words are the tapestry I cannot weave: they are the tapestry that Tom weaved with his very life though. There really is no higher calling than to be of comfort, to be of grace, to be of joy and dignity and to be God's glory.

Thomas William Donaldson was and is and always shall be God's glory. He was full alive here on earth, is fully alive in the nearer presence of God, and the lives of those he traveled this way with are more able to see God's glory because of how he walked his journey home.