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Trinity Episcopal Church

Ecclesiastes 3: 1 – 8 Psalm 23
 Philippians 4: 4 – 9 John 14: 1 – 6, 27

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: ... a time for war and a time for peace.”

“Peace be within your walls, and quietness within your towers.”

“And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

There seems to be something of a theme of peace in all our lessons today, as we celebrate the life and faith of Coke Eugene Rogers, better known to most of us as Gene. While the twenty-third psalm may not actually use the word ‘peace,’ the picture of tranquility, bounty and security that it paints is an image of peace. And peace, or peaceful, is one of the words that I would use to describe Gene Rogers.

Gene was a man of few words. Very few. He was a quiet man, but perhaps in the quietness, he was better able to appreciate the people and the things – especially the things in nature – around him. Gene, as I knew him, was also a gentle spirit, with that particular, shy, perhaps somewhat far away, smile of his. Even if he didn’t have much to say, he always made you feel comfortable and welcome.

One of the places in which Gene found God was in nature – in the trees and the forests, in the animals and birds. An image Meredith described a few months ago stays with me. Gene was having a good day, and so they drove over to some wooded property in Screven County. While Meredith carefully and slowly drove the truck along the edge of a field, Gene sat on the open tailgate, scattering food for his beloved wild turkeys. In their house, there are lots of windows that overlook a couple of ponds, and Gene (when he wasn’t working on a jigsaw puzzle) just loved watching the comings and goings of the ducks and the geese, the hummingbirds and the squirrels, and all of the other wildlife at his windowsill. For Gene, that view of God’s creation was far better than any movie or TV show.

It wasn’t only the fauna in Creation that captured Gene’s attention; the flora did, too. I have some daylilies in my yard, as do perhaps many of you, that came straight from his beautiful garden. Gene took being a steward of God’s earth very seriously and it was a source of great joy for him.

For all of his peaceableness, Gene was still very much a fighter when it came to his health. His quiet strength enabled him to fight the cancer time and again. His willingness to undergo the treatment and therapy gave Gene and Meredith several more years together in which they traveled, enjoyed their large family, and had many meaningful conversations. Gene’s determination and Meredith’s tender care enabled them to appreciate many more months than they expected after the final prognosis. Months in which they could celebrate holidays and special events with their family, especially Gene’s 85th birthday just a couple of weeks ago.

Even as he drew near to death, Gene was at peace. It takes very little to imagine Gene as one of Jesus’ sheep, lying in the field, knowing that his Shepherd was with him, tending him, calling him by name and ready to carry Gene on his shoulders when the time came. “And the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it,” says the writer of Ecclesiastes. If Gene was at all concerned about his breath returning to God from whence it came, it was not obvious.

In his quiet, steady way, Gene was confident that he was crossing the Jordan and going home. The spiritual, Deep River, (which you'll hear sung by Sarah in just a few moments), expresses the longing that is deep within all of us to be in that place where sorrow and pain are no more. That place where we are all whole and healthy and redeemed. That place where we will see God face to face and know God just as we have always been known. That place of deep and abiding peace. Listen to the lyrics for just a moment:

*Deep River, my home is over Jordan.
Deep River, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.
Oh, don't you want to go, to the Gospel feast;
That Promised Land, where all is peace?*

Where all is peace. That place which Jesus goes to prepare for Gene and for each of us. Gene joins those loved ones who have gone before him. I suspect that Claire was right there to meet him, probably with a cat or two in her arms. Gene now dwells in that peaceable kingdom, the Kingdom of God, the nearer presence of God, and is probably, even now, walking with the Lord "among the trees of the garden." [Gen. 3:8]

In Hebrew, the word for peace, Shalom, conveys not merely a lack of war or strife, but rather a wholeness, a well-being, a completeness. In this world, in this lifetime, none of us ever completely get there. We're always at least a little broken, a little unwell, a little incomplete. But in that place that awaits each of us, we are finally and eternally redeemed. We are made whole, and well, and complete. Gene has already experienced it, and it is the inheritance that lies waiting for each of us. When we reach the point where death is no more and we slip into the embracing arms of God, we will arrive home and know it for the first time. We will reach the Promised Land, the land where all is peace.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your minds and hearts in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son, Jesus Christ, for ever and ever. Amen. +