

Memorial Service Sermon for the Rev. Dayle Casey  
Grace and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church  
Colorado Springs, CO  
October 14, 2023  
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I begin with a verse from the book of Micah: *He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God* (Micah 6:8.) I quote this verse from Micah because when I think about Dayle, and when I thought about what I might say to you on this occasion, this verse from Micah came to mind. Dayle Casey was the epitome of kindness, humility, and goodness to me. Over the years, Dayle and I shared many breakfasts, lunches, and coffees together. On one of those occasions, when his health began to fail him, we spoke about memorial services. He expressed some degree of ambivalence about a memorial service for himself. Maybe a simple graveside committal service would be best. He was not sure. I was not surprised. I remember thinking that this comment was so much in keeping with the Dayle I had come to know and love. I am persuaded that what he said at that time suggests a person who does not want to call attention to himself. In other words, the life he lived would be this service. Nothing needed to be said about him. And if anything is to be said, it should be what God has done in his life and his ministry. Is that not one of many reasons why this quiet, self-effacing man endeared himself to us? Furthermore, is not his self-forgetfulness so refreshingly counter to the narcissism and self-absorption of the age in which we live? I think so.

Apart from being a loving husband, father, family member, and friend, Dayle was a rector, pastor, counselor, teacher, and a preacher. Preaching was his greatest passion. Early in his ministry he taught homiletics at Nashotah House. Dayle took preaching very seriously. All preachers worth their salt are humbled by the call to preach. They spend time at it, they work the biblical texts, try to apply them to the reality of human life. Dayle's preaching could be described in numerous ways. Surely one of them is prepared. Seminarians of Dayle's age, and my age, took homiletics classes with text books titled, *The Craft of a Sermon*. We were taught that just as a skilled carpenter crafts a beautiful table or chair, preachers are called to craft sermons. Dayle was superb in crafting and wordsmithing.

Both Dayle and I liked to use a particular phrase in our preaching. The phrase is, *keep the main thing the main thing*. Perhaps our fondness for this expression partially reflects the fact that throughout its history the church has not always kept the main thing, the main thing! From my perspective, this is the main thing: God has given us given us the gift of life; therefore, we are stamped with divine DNA. We belong to God. This is our primary relationship. Through the reality of sin, we have been restored to new life in Christ Jesus. We experience abundant meaning, purpose, and fulfillment when we die to self and seek to be the mind, heart, and hands of Jesus in the relationships in which we find ourselves. This dying to self requires discipline. Christians are instructed by the words from Jesus' first sermon, quoting Isaiah he said: *the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free.* (Luke 4:18). Helping to establish the love, peace, justice, and mercy of God in the world must be part of the church's ministry. Dayle might have used other words, but I know he would agree with the thrust of what I have just said. He preached this main thing persuasively throughout his ministry.

The Bible is, of course, the source document for it all. Dayle had a very high view of holy scripture. He immersed himself in it. Many of you know that for many years after his retirement Dayle led a bible study. He knew that the primary reason for studying the Bible is to ground ourselves in the grace of God and accept God's claim on our lives, with the goal of living our lives to the glory of God, not our own glory.

Christians should be comforted by the gospel of Jesus. However, the good news of Jesus inherently challenges and judges us. It requires a response on our part. This was a recurring theme in Dayle's preaching. In the Old Testament reading that Dayle chose for today, the people are told to walk in God's ways and understand that *they do not live by bread alone, but by the word that comes from the mouth of God*. If the people forget the Lord and worship false Gods, the course of their lives will not go well (Deuteronomy 8:12-20). The reading is about accountability. This is also the case with the gospel story where judgement is pronounced on the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). In Psalm 90, we are challenged *to number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom*. In other words, we only have a certain amount of time to get it right when it comes to living our lives. Those scriptures were important to Dayle. He wanted us to be instructed by them this morning.

Friends, my reading of the New Testament tells me that Jesus never asked us to worship him. Rather, he asked us to follow him. That is why Christians are called *people of the Way*. Alas, too many Christians allow Sunday worship and creedal affirmation to become substitutes for the hard work of following Jesus. For the Christian, the best way to worship God is not to sing a hymn about Jesus, but to follow Jesus. Dayle's preaching was always a call to faithful obedience, a call to follow Jesus. Choosing to follow Jesus inevitably means that we must come face to face with idolatries that destroy the image of God by which mankind is marked. Idolatries of power, status, narcissism, relativism, material possessions, victimization, failure to work for the common good, immediately come to mind. These things and more are the source of systemic disease that afflicts all too many of us. Allegiance to these idolatries is a major reason for the brokenness of our society.

The further truth is that too often the church has minimized both the prophetic voices of the Old Testament, and the prophetic dimension of Jesus' preaching..... and has failed to challenge institutional evil. In his preaching, Dayle Casey would have none of it. Dayle knew that the only cure for individual brokenness and the brokenness of our institutions is, in the words of the lesson from Deuteronomy, *by walking in God's ways*. The cure is spiritual transformation, allowing God to change our hearts.

Someone once asked me to name the best foundations for effective preaching. Several came to mind. Here is one of them: a strong commitment to reading, both non-fiction and fiction. Dayle was a voracious reader. Whenever we went out for breakfast, lunch, or coffee, he usually arrived first, almost always with a book in hand. Invariably, when I entered the room, I found him reading. After I retired, Dayle and I got together in May and September to share birthday meals. On those occasions we were in the habit of giving each other a book. I was usually filled with fear and trembling when I gave Dayle a book because I knew there was better than a 50/50 chance that he would have already read it! Dayle was an ardent student, with a keen intellect, always wanting to be fed by ideas and perspectives. One time over coffee, I mentioned a book, written by a theologian we both respected. He asked me if I had enjoyed it. I hesitated a bit, but then decided to come clean. I told him that I never finished the book because after I read the first chapter, I had no idea what I was reading --- it was so dense and complicated. His response was a breath of fresh air: *Me too!* Thank you, Dayle!

Those of you who knew Dayle well, know that especially in these latter years, he sometimes expressed disappointment with the church. We spoke about this the last time we were together. The source of his disappointment had to do with one of the church's besetting sins, namely, a pre-occupation with itself, the church worshiping itself, focusing on what might be called institutional maintenance, at the expense of its call to engage in witness and mission beyond the walls of the church. Despite this reality, I do not believe that Dayle ever lost hope in the church because he knew that this is God's church, not ours. He also knew what the power of God can do and has done whenever the church gets its act together. Furthermore, despite his disappointment with the church, he understood the fact that civilization would never have come to know Jesus without the church.

For Dayle, concern for the downtrodden and building a just and merciful society must be a significant focus for Christian ministry. Nowhere is this more evident than in his love of the people of Haiti, and his personal ministry to the poor of Petit Trou de Nippes. Here, my mind goes to Ed Morgan, now of blessed memory. Ed was one Dayle's closest friends. Ed and Dayle founded the Colorado Haiti Project. Their faithful ministry to Petit Trou de Nippes made such a difference to Christians who have so little and who continue to struggle. If today's service results in financial gifts to *Locally Haiti*, a diocesan ministry to Haiti, I know it would warm Dayle's heart.

After our last lunch together, I came across a quotation from William Sloane Coffin that resonated with me. I thought I would email it to him because he was a bit down, and it might give him a little boost, so to speak. But Dayle's condition worsened and I did not send it to him. I want to share it with you today because I know Dayle would have liked to read it. Coffin said:

*we may not know what is beyond the grave, but we do know who is beyond the grave.  
And there is more mercy in him than sin in us,  
more faith in him, than doubt in us,  
and more hope for the world in him, than anything else on the horizon.*

I believe that this holy hope sustained Dayle in the inevitable ups and downs of his life and his ministry.

Each of us knew Dayle in his or her own unique way. In its totality, the love we had for Dayle is a beautiful mosaic of remembrance that God has given us individually and collectively. As we leave this service today, and go our separate ways, may our experience of this mosaic cause our hearts to overflow with thanksgiving and joy.

Dayle would not want my last words to be about him, but about the One who gave us this good and kind man. So, for the life he lived, and for the difference he made in each of our lives, I finish by saying: *To God, all praise and glory.*

Amen

