



A Homily  
Preached at the Requiem  
For David I. Barr  
Saint James Chapel  
11 September, 2017  
By the Revd. Dr. D. Stuart Dunnan

“People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them . . .”  
(Mark 10.13)

In nomine . . .

We are met of course to celebrate the life, appreciate the gift, and pray for the soul of Dave Barr, who has loomed large in our life at Saint James since he first came to this campus in the fall of 1948, which is just shy of 70 years ago.

And here let me acknowledge that this is not a tragic occasion. There is a feeling of loss, for his children and grandchildren especially, and for so many more, but all of us who have visited him over these last two years know that his time to move on was near, and that he has wanted to be with Betty for some time. He was also very ill and not himself physically, so anxious to be whole again.

Indeed, like many who have lived long and faithful lives and who have loved deeply and significantly with their lives, he was living in two worlds at the same time, both in this and the next, already talking to Jesus. And he never stopped talking to Betty, and I am sure that she never stopped talking to him. In fact, as we heard, his children got a glimpse of the afterlife in Dave’s hospital room two nights before he died when he was speaking to people in that room with him whom he could see but they could not.

There is a wonderful print depicting the priest lifting the host at the Eucharist with all of heaven opening above and before him that used to hang over the vesting table in the sacristies of my youth reminding us just how close heaven is to us, how near Our Lord and all his saints who love us, so how full the life

which waits for us, the life that Dave knows now. This is why we gather at this altar to be with Christ, to be at that door which his sacrifice of himself has opened for us, to pray for Dave as he crosses that threshold “as one we love, but see no longer.”

In the Gospel passage we just heard, St. Mark tells that wonderful story of Our Lord blessing the little children who come to him despite the objections of his disciples. And this story is particularly appropriate for Dave for two reasons. First, we see in Our Lord’s desire to bless the children and to touch them so much of how Dave touched us – always physically with a hug and a kiss, and really, with great joy and palpable affection. Secondly, we are reminded of Dave’s own child-like nature, his loving response to life and to all around him, which gave him great power to include, encourage, and heal as he lived his life amongst us.

This is why he was such a wonderful coach and teacher, husband, father, and grandfather, mentor, colleague, and friend. He touched us with something of the love of God. He supported us, believed in us, cared for us, and it was never an either/or equation for him; it was always a both/and. And it was always about us, never about him.

And even in the “old days” before my time when Saint James was a real boys’ school and a more “rough and tumble” place, and Dave had the unenviable role of “school disciplinarian,” he always engaged directly and honestly with the students as he responded to their good and bad behaviors. He played no ego games with them or with his colleagues. And he was loved for this, respected and admired, even by those who tested him.

Just think about his coaching. He was a tremendous athlete in his own right and a gifted coach who transformed athletics at Saint James, but because he was at Saint James, always playing against the odds, he lost many games. But he won more than anybody else could, and he never left. He never went on to some power house school to build his personal record; instead, to his great credit, he stayed with his athletes, even that first girls’ basketball team that he coached with Eddie Hoyer. He stayed with his school, because he knew that he was needed.

Given his gifts, he was a remarkably humble man who never bragged about himself or pursued his own agenda. Rather, he taught his students and coached his players with enthusiasm, and he delighted in their successes. His concern was always for them: “Are you all right? Do you understand? You can do it, Buddy. We can win.”

Even at the end of his life when I would visit him at Diakon, I could never get him to talk about himself; he would only ask about me, and ask about the school. “How is school, Father? How are you doing? I love you. Thank you so much for coming!”

And let’s be honest: he did much more for me than I ever did for him. In fact, it is not an overstatement to say that I would not be standing in this pulpit 26 years after I met him, if it were not for Dave and Betty Barr. And I am sure that he did much the same for you.

In his epistle, St. John reminds us, “See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.” (1John 3.1-2)

Dave knew this. He knew this about himself, and he knew this about us too. This is why he was so open to loving us so fully - with all the joy of a child – a child of 92.

And this is why he taught and coached his students here so effectively, establishing such a personal connection: he understood teenagers. He knew that they are greatly tempted to reject the gratitude, humility, and vulnerability of their childhoods in their desperate need to grow up, so frustrated by every obstacle or expectation, and angry at all in authority over them.

But he just broke through all that adolescent angst and told them how great they were: “Love you, Buddy. All right, Tiger-roo! Great pass; great touchdown; awesome job!”

Miss Sherman tells the story of a boy whom Dave was tutoring in the library long after he had retired. After several sessions with Dave, the boy was doing much better in his Algebra class, and feeling pretty good about himself. He even told Miss Sherman that he thought that Mr. Barr really liked him. “He calls me Biddy-Buddy.”

There is a reason why Dave called everybody “Buddy.” It’s because we were. We were all of us his friends, and there were too many of us to remember all of our names all of the time. I myself was “Father Buddy” most of the time, and not infrequently Father Owens, which was of course a great compliment. He also made no distinctions between us: he loved us all enthusiastically – from the youngest to the oldest, the poorest to the richest, the most challenged to the most

gifted. He loved us as God loves us: each of us and all of us, when and how we needed him.

So, here is my point: we don't have to be afraid for Dave. Christ knows his own, those who love and follow him. The shepherd knows his sheep. We can also see in Dave and remember when we think of him just how much Christ uses others to love us: to hug and kiss us, to tell us how great we are, to be more interested in us than they are in themselves, even when they themselves are suffering from the loss and pain which comes with old age.

But here is the question which Our Lord himself would ask us: wouldn't it be wonderful if we all could live for love more fully, just as Dave did? Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all could forget what we are angry about, how others have disappointed us, and just build that bridge and get over it? If only we all could be like him: more grateful, humble, loyal, and vulnerable, more bravely the children of God, and thus more open to the love of God, so that he might use us more powerfully to show his love to others?

For surely then we would not have to wait for heaven as Dave did. Heaven would be here with us now, and the love of Christ would surround and fill our lives with the joy and peace he intends for us.

Amen