

**A SERVICE OF REMEMBRANCE AND RESURRECTION
FOR
BISHOP RUEBEN P. JOB**

**Psalm 138
I John 4:7-10
John 14:18-27**

**Belmont UMC
Nashville, TN
January 18, 2015**

**THE WORD THAT YOU HEAR IS NOT MINE;
IT IS THE WORD OF THE FATHER...**

John 14:24b

I greet you in the powerful name and spirit of the Risen Christ.

We gather today to remember and celebrate the life and witness of one of God's beloved – Rueben P. Job. We gather today to share the Job family's grief and to surround them with our love. We gather today to say goodbye to a dear friend, a mentor, a ministry colleague, a spiritual leader, a bishop of the Church. We gather today to “sing about the Lord's ways ... because the Lord's faithful love lasts forever” (Psalm 138:5 & 8). We gather today to give testimony to our resurrection faith and joy. We gather today to affirm that because Christ lives, Rueben lives.

On a crisp, sun-drenched, radiant September afternoon in 2013, I called Rueben while I was driving across the Dakotas landscape on my way to a series of meetings in Mitchell, South Dakota. I called to see how Rueben and Beverly were doing. But honestly, I called just to hear Rueben's voice – just to be in his presence – to be strengthened and nurtured by his calm, affirming spirit, like so many other occasions over the past 40 years of our shared journey.

The splendor of the day caused me to begin describing to Rueben what I was seeing – the ripening fields of corn and soybeans, the deep blue prairie sky, the flock of white pelicans circling overhead, the water level in the prairie potholes, the freshly plowed fields. Suddenly, he interrupted me and said: “I can see it! I can see it! This is where I go when I close my eyes.”

I do not know what heaven looks like, but I am confident that for Rueben it looked like the North Dakota prairie that he loved, that shaped him and where God found him and would not let him go until he responded to God's invitation to come near.

Rueben closed his eyes for the final time on January 3, 2015, fulfilling the powerful metaphor he used to teach us all about living fully and dying well. Most of you are familiar with this story.

I would approach our farmstead from a small hill and when I got to the top of the hill, there was our house. I would begin running down that hill, unbuttoning my jacket, and if it was warm, my shirt. I would burst into the kitchen that was filled with the aroma of fresh bread, or cookies, prepared by my mother and just waiting for my arrival.

I loved school, the excitement of learning and the fun of being with other children, but there was no place like home and the loving welcome for me there, so I ran the last distance, slipping off my clothes as I ran in preparation for taking off my “school clothes” and putting on my “home clothes.”

... One day you will hear, Rueben has died; let there be no sorrow, but celebration as you remind each other, "He just slipped out of his school clothes and put on his home clothes, he is home now."

Rueben loved the rain. He knew first-hand the renewing power of a prairie thunderstorm. He told Beverly, as death drew near, that he wanted to go home in a rainstorm. It was raining in Nashville on January 3 as Rueben put on his home clothes.

Rueben had no anxiety about his death because for him there was no distinction between being at home with Christ in this earthly life or in eternity. I am sure Rueben is now delighting in the further exploration of the great mystery of God and all creation. He and Norm Shawchuck, who preceded him in death 2 ½ years ago, are probably already at work outlining the next *Guide to Prayer*. Rueben will continue to be my teacher and mentor when I, too, arrive home.

Rueben asked me nearly two years ago to preach at his service of remembrance and resurrection. He was very explicit – stubbornly explicit. He wanted me to preach the Gospel – the love, forgiveness, salvation, hope, joy and resurrection that is ours in Christ Jesus. I know he was afraid I would stand here today and simply tell you stories about him – some which I am sure he would not want repeated. In my denial of his death and the well-established pattern of teasing that we had cultivated over the years, I told Rueben it would be easy to accept his invitation because all I would have to do is stand and say, "Rueben was the Gospel" and sit down. (Can I get an Amen!)

Rueben accomplished much in his 86 years – a devoted, loving husband, father and grandfather; a pastor of vital congregations (long before we felt a need to define vitality); a visionary, courageous bishop; World Editor of *The Upper Room*; author of 20 books; the father of the modern spiritual formation movement in the church; the chairperson of the *Hymnal* Revision Committee; a quiet activist; a radical mystic; a gentle prophet; the spiritual guide to hundreds of thousands. And the list goes on. He was truly a man of God who seemed set apart for his role among us. For many of us, Rueben was clearly, tangibly a living saint.

Now, Rueben would be embarrassed with this recitation of his accomplishments. He would be very uncomfortable with the notion of being called a saint. In fact, he would probably be upset with me. Remember, he wanted me to preach the Gospel. It was never about Rueben; it was always about God and God's faithfulness. It was never about Rueben; it was always about the word and spirit of God living in and working through him. I will never forget the first time I heard Rueben say, and then repeat time and time again, "The spiritual journey begins and ends with God." This endeavor we are all engaged in; this calling which we have all embraced; this journey into the heart of God we all hunger for is first, foremost and forever about God and God's faithful love for us.

Jesus was having a similar discussion with his disciples in his farewell discourse recorded for us in chapters 14 – 17 of John's gospel, a portion of which Rueben wanted us to hear today. Prior to his crucifixion, Jesus was giving his most intimate friends and followers a summary lesson on the second incarnation. We all affirm that Jesus is the Light of the world; a Light that shines in the darkness and a

Light that cannot be extinguished. Jesus is the Word made flesh; the Word of God made manifest, visible, tangible in Jesus; a Word that conquers death and sin and offers abundant life.

But, Jesus is reminding his disciples there are two parts to the mystery of incarnation. There is the mystery of God becoming flesh in Jesus Christ. And, there is the mystery of God living in us through the gift of the Holy Spirit. This second incarnation of God's extravagant love and grace happens through our flesh and blood, our hands and feet, our words and actions. This is the centerpiece of Jesus' teaching and prayer for his disciples. It could not be clearer.

I won't leave you as orphans. I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you... The word that you hear isn't mine. It is the word of the Father who sent me.

John 14:18-19 & 24b, *Common English Bible*

Jesus was conducting the very first Academy for Spiritual Formation. And, you all thought that Rueben participated in birthing the very first Academy! Jesus prayed that God would make his disciples – you and me – holy in the truth so that the world would know God's extravagant, faithful love.

Jesus' prayer was Rueben's prayer. Rueben devoted his entire life and ministry to the formation of pastors, laity, and church structures into the image of Christ for the sake of the world. He devoted his entire life and ministry to forming individuals and organizations into vessels that carry, not their own words, but the Word of God; vessels in which the Word of God is deeply embedded, transparent, joyfully expressive, fully redemptive – no longer second nature, but first nature.

Such formation in Christ for the sake of the world starts with love – God's faithful, undying love. The First Letter of John states this truth with poetic, penetrating power:

...everyone who loves is born from God and knows God. The person who doesn't love does not know God, because God is love.

I John 4:7-8, *Common English Bible*

Rueben was absolutely clear about this. It was his mantra, his gyroscope, his anchor, and his source of life. When I asked him what he wanted me to preach today, he said:

Everyone is God's beloved child. God doesn't make the distinctions we make. I began to feel this when God called me on the Dakota prairie. That's when I knew I was beloved of God. I wanted everyone to know this.

Thus began Rueben's life work as pastor, evangelist, author, bishop, and spiritual guide. And he did it well. He loved gently and unconditionally; he loved intentionally and inclusively; he loved boldly and authentically.

Bill Cotton, a member of Bishop Job's cabinet in the Iowa Conference offered the following observation in a recent blog:

Bishop Job had another trait that was rare for church leaders. One could fail, make mistakes, and he would find a way to encourage you without placing blame. And if he caught you doing something right, the letter would come, often hand-written, simply telling you how well you had done. I wonder how he found time to write all of those letters. But that was Bishop Job. People were more important than program(s)...

Rueben's love extended to the world and all creation. He embraced Jesus' vision of a world in which God is making all things new. A world in which tears are wiped away, pain is no more, peace prevails, injustice is swept away, all are included in the family of God, and the thirsty receive water from the spring of life. Rueben stood against injustice and oppression, not as an angry crusader, but as a loving, grace-filled advocate and partner with the least of these. When others suffered, he suffered. His diseased heart was nothing compared to the broken heart he had for the victims of external injustice and internal darkness. When the icy threat of farm foreclosures colored rural Iowa with despair in the mid-1980's and destroyed hundreds of farm families, Rueben responded by telling the people that the conference would not close their churches. "We need the people more than we need their money," he said.

If formation in Christ for the sake of the world starts with love – God's faithful love – it blossoms and matures as we attend to the ordinances of God, as we practice a radical attentiveness to God, as we seek to stay in love with God. So Jesus taught:

Whoever loves me will keep my word... Remain in me, and I will remain in you... Likewise, you can't produce fruit unless you remain in me... Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will remain in my love, just as I kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy will be in you and your joy will be complete.

John 14:23 & 15:4, 9-11, *Common English Bible*

I was privileged and blessed to be part of a covenant group with Rueben and 3 other clergy colleagues for over 25 years. Rueben invited me to join the group when he observed I was in a spiritual crisis. We were serving together on the Dakotas Area program staff at the time. Rueben and the group rescued me from a dark night of the soul, taught me to pray and nurtured me back to spiritual health. Our covenant included the general rules for all Methodist communities

– do no harm, do good and stay in love with God. I struggled with keeping the covenant, particularly all the means of grace. I did not look forward to the accountability portion of our gatherings.

But, then, by the grace of God, I finally was able to honor and practice each of my substantial list of disciplines every day we had been apart. I couldn't wait for our meeting. Puffed up with pride, I rehearsed each accomplishment of piety. Rueben listened attentively, but I could tell he was not impressed. When I completed my recitation, Rueben leaned forward, a twinkle in his eye, a little smile forming on his lips. (Who has received this look from Rueben?) He patiently told me a story. He reminded me that he had grown up on a tree claim farm in south central North Dakota. Tree claims were 160-acre farms awarded under President Abraham Lincoln's Land Grant Act to any farmer who would plant five acres of trees and keep them alive for five years. As a boy, one of Rueben's chores was to haul water drawn from a deep well on the farm to water those five acres of trees. Rueben concluded his story by saying, "Bruce, the spiritual disciplines are like the pipe in that deep well. They are not the water, only the way to reach the Living Water."

How many of you here this afternoon were shown the way to reach the Living Water through Rueben's teaching, writing, example or spiritual direction? Rueben awakened in all who encountered him a burning thirst for the Living Water. He taught us that the disciplined life places and holds us in a presence of the Living Water. For Rueben, prayer was not perfunctory or idolatrous; it was pure and intimate. Rueben abided in Christ and demonstrated by his example that fruitfulness and joy and the capacity to love as God loves flow from unceasing prayer and attentiveness to God.

If formation in Christ for the sake of the world starts with God's faithful love and matures as we practice three simple rules, it expresses itself in what Rueben called "spiritual embarrassment." God created us to speak and act. We stand in a long tradition of those who are called to reveal the unsearchable riches of God. We have been given authority to speak the words and engage in the acts of justice and compassion that reveal the fullness of God's power, mercy and might. The problem with having a little authority is that we may fall in love with it. Enamored with our authority, we become noisy gongs and clanging symbols. Focused on ourselves, we often do harm, fail to do good, and begin to perceive ourselves as God, rather than loving the God who created us.

Rueben had a well-developed theology of spiritual embarrassment, by which he meant, we need to know our place. He taught and modeled that the disciple must understand his or her relationship to the Mystery if he or she is to be of any help to the community of faith. I remember Rueben saying to a class of new ordinands: "On the day you are convinced that you got it right, go quickly and surrender your orders to the bishop because you have just become God and not God's servant." Ouch! Rueben was gentle, but he could be very direct.

Jesus was constantly trying to teach his disciples a theology of spiritual embarrassment. He was constantly trying to help his disciples understand their relationship to the Mystery of God and to all of God's beloved children. The last shall be first. The Master is the servant of all. Blessed are those who are humble, because they will inherit the earth. And, this great teaching from I John on "knowing our place."

It is not that we loved God, but that God loved us and sent his Son as the sacrifice that deals with our sins.

I John 4:10, *Common English Bible*

Rueben practiced the spiritual disciplines of humility and downward mobility. He did not parade in public. He did not seek celebrity status. He always placed others above himself in all things, often using his highly developed wry, witty and self-effacing humor to do so. Rueben was never full of himself. He was a true servant leader.

Rueben penned these words in his journal in 1984 as he contemplated the magnitude of the office for which he was a candidate.

The episcopacy is not a prize to be won; it is not a goal to be achieved or a level of employment to be attained. At its very best, the episcopacy is an invitation, a call from God, discerned, and confirmed by the church, accepted by an individual, and lived out in community with other Christians in the world.

"When Rueben talked about discernment," explained a former district superintendent, "he was not just using jargon. His life was a venture in discernment, an earnest attempt to seek and to know the will of God in human life and in the Church." Rueben knew his place. And, he yearned and prayed for a Church with a well-developed theology of spiritual embarrassment.

If formation in Christ for the sake of the world starts with God's faithful love and matures as we practice three simple rules and expresses itself in a posture of spiritual embarrassment and servant leadership, then it results in our union with God – what John Wesley referred to as the Spirit of God in the soul of man.

Jesus promised his disciples he would not leave them as orphans. He would come to them again. God's Spirit, a Companion, the Spirit of Truth, would come and dwell within them. And on that day, they would know the Spirit of God within their souls. Paul picks up on this theme when he prays for the Ephesians:

I pray that you will know the love of Christ that is beyond knowledge so that you will be filled entirely with the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:19, *NRSV*

Do you believe this? Do you believe God intends to live fully within each of us? It seems impossible and incredibly risky on God's part. But that is the goal – that is the plan – that you and I would be filled with the fullness of God. And remember God is love. So this means you and I would be filled with the fullness of God's love – loving as God loves.

There it is! I believe this is what Rueben wanted me to preach as we celebrate his resurrection. That we would all develop the capacity to love as God loves.

The writer, Annie Dillard, tells the story of a moth she once observed circling the flame of a candle. The moth loved the light so much that it circled closer and closer until it actually caught fire. It fell onto the top of the candle, flaming brightly as it died. Then the most amazing thing happened. The moth's body began to draw wax out of the candle. It became a second wick for the candle's flame. In death, the moth became part of the light it loved so much. Annie Dillard reports that it burned all night, giving light to the room.

Rueben loved the Light so much he spent his life circling it, moving closer and closer; going deeper and deeper into the heart of God. Long before his death, he became a second wick for the candle's flame. Long before his death, he became a part of the Light he loved. Long before his death, he was filled with the fullness of God.

A former episcopal colleague noted, "Rueben was one of the few truly spiritual men I have known. His inner world seemed cleansed and sanctified. He was an authentic Christian." And, Rev. Tim Eberhart, assistant professor at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and a clergy member of the Dakotas Conference, commented that Rueben "visibly, physically glowed with the love of God with his countenance, his person, even his skin."

We all know what these individuals are saying. People gravitated to Rueben because he radiated Christ's light and love. Is that not true for us here this afternoon?

I had many occasions to be with Rueben in public settings to observe this phenomenon. Even in restaurants, the waitresses would gravitate to Rueben and take his order first. I would tease Rueben that it was because of his rugged handsomeness and I said to him that I felt obligated to tell Beverly. But, I knew they saw what we all saw – a gentle, kind mystic. A person in which God's heart was united with Rueben's heart.

Henry Thoreau said, "It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look ... that is the highest of arts."

God gave Rueben P. Job the gift that is the "highest of arts." Rueben changed the culture and environment through which those around him – and indeed the entire Church – look and see life. Is this not true? We all look at the world and the Church differently because of *Three Simple Rules*. I have been fortunate to be one of those – along with many, many others – who have experienced this gift God imparted to Rueben, and have been enriched, challenged, taken

where I had not intended, and been blessed beyond my imagination because Rueben helped me see a new reality.

So Rueben, dear friend and brother in the faith, the shepherd of souls, as we remember your life this day and celebrate your resurrection in Christ, we thank you for sharing your gifts of faith and vision so generously with friends and strangers and for your willingness to help us be about the work of changing, not only the environment and culture through which we look and see, but helping us to be changed ourselves.

Rueben probably would not have actualized or fulfilled his gift that is the “highest of arts” without Beverly at his side. Rueben was a force for change and spiritual transformation because Beverly brought to their partnership of 61-plus years an unwavering devotion to Rueben and family, a profound compassion for God’s people and an unpretentious spirituality. Every soul friend needs a soul friend – and you, Beverly, were such for Rueben. I thank God for blessing your love. And I thank God for the joy and love you, along with Debbie, Ann and David, Phil and Renae, David and Annie and all the grandchildren shared with Rueben. I know you will miss him dearly, as will I, even as we celebrate his being released into God’s arms.

I will let Rueben’s own words and testimony conclude my comments. This is a portion of what Rueben shared with the Council of Bishops about God’s call and claim on his life.

As a young farmer, I knew the wonderful experience of being ready for winter. Food and shelter secured for the various animals that we wintered. Enough supplies to see us through the cold days of winter and into the warm days of spring.

I feel much the same in the wintertime of my life. I have done what I could, prepared as well as I knew how, and now there is time for reflection, gathering and harvesting the insights of a long life. And despite the relentless limitations of illness and aging, there is deep peace, security and even tranquility, not because of what I have done, but because of what God has done and continues to do.

My failures, incomplete vision and misguided efforts are numerous, all the result, I am sure, of listening too much to the voice of the world and too little to the voice of God.

My peace, hope and comfort come from the God made known most clearly in the life of Jesus. The Heidelberg Confession is the basis for a statement of faith that begins something like this.

***That I belong
In life and in death
Body and soul
To my faithful Savior***

Ah yes, that we belong to our faithful Savior

What more can we ask?

We belong to God

And therein alone

Is our peace

Our comfort

Our security

And our hope

For today

And for all time.

Thanks be to God!

It is enough!

You were correct, Rueben.

It is enough. It has always been enough.

Thanks be to God for the life and witness of Rueben Philip Job.

Amen.



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