

The Farewell Service for Ed Lancaster
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, TX
30 March 2022

John 11:21-27

Welcome to this celebration of life for our friend Ed Lancaster. I am glad to see you all here today on this rainy morning. Let me start my sermon by telling you a story I shared with Ed a while back. It is no secret to anyone that sometimes persons of means build more enemies than friends throughout their lives. One of the biggest fears of these people was that no one would show up at their wake or funeral when they died. For this reason, many of them would leave provisions and instructions that upon their death "**Las lloronas**" were to be called. A literal translation of **Las lloronas** is "crying ladies," but a more generic translation would be professional mourners. These mourners would charge the family a fee in exchange for which they would attend the wake and funeral and cry loudly about the person who died: how wonderful he was, how much he meant to them, etc. The more distinguished and wealthier the person was, the more **lloronas** were hired. There are stories that when a well-known governor died in the early 1900's, only about 25 people of the 400 plus in attendance at the funeral actually knew who he was.

Well, less there be any doubts, let me make it clear that all the hundreds of people in attendance here actually knew Ed Lancaster, loved him, respected him, and were deeply sorry and shocked about his sudden death. Ed has been a pillar of this community for decades. During this time, he had a successful career in retail management, built an impressive company (his second career,) raised a loving family, and served this community with distinction, humility, and great love. As a priest, I can tell you that I have often received secret complaints about everyone on this room, but I have never heard a negative word or complaint made against Ed. Just the opposite, he was always a fair and thoughtful man who could be relied upon and who spoke the truth, even when the truth was difficult to hear. (Story about my sermon being "bombastic.") And, as a pillar of this community, Ed had the qualities that make pillars fundamentally important to the integrity of any structure. He had a deep foundation, constancy, inner strength, unwavering commitment, and the ability to keep things in balance. I knew him as a man who loved his wife, his children and grandchildren, and his great-grand child. He was a man who served in multiple ministries at Saint Dunstan's and who was a reliable and wise counselor in our Finance Committee, always guiding us with calm determination and tremendous love for these buildings and the people who worship in them.

I also know Ed as a man who was very proud of his children. I remember one day we were talking about his family and their accomplishments. Suddenly,

Ed had this far of look in his eyes, and with great emotion, he turned to me and said, "As a father, I couldn't be more proud of the men they have become." And I believe Ed truly meant it. He was very proud of his children's accomplishments, and he felt truly blessed that his beloved company was safe and healthy in their capable hands.

On a personal level, I will miss Ed's support for my ministry. Almost every Monday during these last two years of ministry, I received a text or an e-mail from Ed congratulating me on a good Sunday, making a positive comment about my sermon, or suggesting an improvement in live streaming or sound. We shared a healthy libation a number of times, and Ed was always deeply interested in my plans for Saint Dunstan's. He saw great potential in this church, and he shared my dreams and aspirations for our common future. I will miss his honesty, his friendship, and his wicked sense of humor. But most of all, I will miss his friendship and love.

Today we are here to say goodbye to a great man. And to do this, we read the words of the Gospel of John. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die." This is the promise we celebrate this morning. After 84 years of life on this earth, Ed returns to the one to whom he belongs, the one who came to earth to do his Father's will to save his children and bring them safely home. Jesus has come to claim his own and one day he will raise his own to life everlasting in a place without pain and suffering, without tears and anguish, without loss and mourning. We know that this very day, Ed claims this promise for himself and joins his Savior in paradise. I know this because Ed was a person of deep faith. He loved Jesus and he loved this church. He also loved the people God placed in his life, both in this congregation and in his personal and professional life. Above all, however, Ed loved his beloved wife, his best friend and companion for sixty years of his journey on earth.

But, let me make it clear that I don't believe Ed is in Paradise today because of anything he did, but rather, because of what Christ did for him. I grew up thinking that when you died you came before God, the judge, in a celestial courtroom where your sins were tabulated, your acts of charity were then subtracted from the total, and the remaining balance was converted into a sentence to be served somewhere far away from heaven. It was only after this sentence was paid in full that the believer was allowed into God's glory. Let me assure you that there is nothing that can separate the believer from the full, complete, and unmerited grace of God given to us through his Son, Jesus Christ. The great news today is that if there is a trial on the other side, Jesus of Nazareth willingly and gladly takes our place and pays the price for us, not because we deserve it, but because he loves us in ways that are unimaginable.

In the Gospel today Jesus makes it abundantly clear that he is the resurrection and the life. What this means is that salvation is up to him and not up to us. Ed knew this well. Jesus of Nazareth came into the world to save sinners, to do for us what we are unable to do for ourselves, to lead us from judgement, guilt, anxiety and shame to the glory of resurrection, victory, and eternal life. This is why we are here in this church this morning. Today we celebrate that Ed Lancaster, after serving God and his family all the days of his life, has now been taken home by the one who loves him without measure.

So, in a way, this funeral is not so much for Ed, but for us, who still journey on this earthly pilgrimage and who still walk by faith and not by sight. We know where Ed is and we celebrate the fact that he is home with God. But now we must take care of ourselves and the ones we love. Ed's sudden death must remind us that life is short and precious. We are here one day and gone the next and it is because of this reality that we must do all we can to love God and those people God places in our lives.

My friends, one of the things I have learned over 27 years as a Social Worker and 15 years as a priest is that life is too short to allow resentment, bitterness, and anger to keep us chained to the past and unable to enjoy the freedom and joy for which God created us. I pray today that Ed's death may be the inspiration you need to forgive, to ask for forgiveness, and to mend broken relationships that still cause you emotional or spiritual pain. May Ed's death remind you that life is better when it is lived in community and when it is lived in harmony and peace.

May our Lord continue to bless you all. Amen!