

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33 The Rev. Dr. Anita Schell-Lambert
Psalm 23 KRJ, said by all Saturday, February 18, 2011
Revelation 21:2-7 Celebration of the life of James Ernst Otilige
John 1:1-14 Burial Office Rite 2

“We sing a song of the saints of God, patient and brave and true, who toiled and fought and lived and died for the Lord they lived as knew” AMEN

That saint of whom we sing today is James Ernst Otilige. Of course we sing, because Jim sang in the Emmanuel Coir since age 8. Of course we sing, because we know how much Jim loved to sing. Of course we sing, because the hymns today reflect the life of Jim and inspire us to practice in our lives the words we sing. So, Jim, here's to your voice and witness and courage and faith, seen through the hymns for your funeral. May the words that we sing and profess in our hearts remind us of your Christian witness and service, particularly at this time.

We began this celebration with the Easter hymn “The strife is over,” and indeed the strife with his body is over for Jim. While Jim's physical body got weaker in his final months and days, his spiritual body just got stronger and stronger. It was inspirational to behold Jim getting ready for the next life. His courage was unstoppable; his spirit ever stronger. What a tenacious fighter he was! And now that strife in his body is over and his Spirit reigns free with God.

“Lift High the Cross,” was Jim's favorite hymn. I can't imagine how Paula weaseled that information out of him when we sang that hymn for him in December when we celebrated his 80th birthday here at Emmanuel. “Lift High the cross, the love of God proclaim” is what Jim did every day of his life, and what we are all called to do as well. In his witness to service Jim followed the grace of daily obligation, from his being here every Sunday, to setting up the altar for Sunday and weekday services, to putting up the hymn numbers for the 10 AM Sunday service. You will notice that the hymn boards are blank today. They are intentionally that

way as we remember this saint among us who relished these simple chores – including putting up hymns (believe me, I tried to do that once and was told in no uncertain terms that that was HIS job). It was all service to Him.

“Here I am Lord” we will sing as the first Communion hymn. That was Jim ‘s motto for life. “Here I am Lord – Are you calling me? “I will go, Lord , where you lead me.” Last fall, Jim believed that God was leading him to help get the Men’s Group started at Emmanuel and start it did. The Men’s Group, with Jim as one of the first members, is flourishing, as you see in members of the Group being honorary pallbearers. Can’t you just see Jim ‘s twinkle at all this wonderful Christian witness and service? As with his choir service, Jim was a joiner and the consummate team player. It was never about Jim; it was always about service to his family, his church, his country, his Lord.

“I am the bread of Life,” our second communion hymn, reminds us of Jim’s service in setting up for Communion every Sunday with Paula. Now it’s not clear to me if Jim was an official member or not of the Altar Guild, but that did not stop him from setting up for communion, crawling in closets (really, who else was as skinny as Jim to be able to do that anyway), putting up the altar hangings, moving altars - you name it, Jim did it when it came to setting up for communion.

In celebration of the life of Jim, we will conclude this service with the simple and profound hymn, “Seek Ye First.” Jim truly lived that motto, if you but seek God’s Kingdom first (and not your own desires) everything else will be added to you. Alleluia. So this service is packed with wonderful music that highlights not only Jim’s service in the choir, but also his Christian faithfulness, as described in all the hymns as well as the choir anthem.

Yes, Jim loved to sing in the choir, and in his wonderful way, always strongly recommended singing in the choir to everyone and even admonished others about their not being more people willing to sing. And, as he told our Director of Music twice before he died, “I am fed up with being sick and being laid up and I can't wait until

I get better, so I can come back and sing!" Who could not love Jim, my buddy, OUR buddy, whose faithfulness in all aspects of his life was truly exemplary. His Christian witness to service was a model to us all. And that indomitable spirit and twinkle in his eye, and the way he moved, who could not love Jim Otilige, even though he could "drive us crazy" being the bundle of energy he was – and still is – in the greater world with God of which we can only hope for and imagine. No one knew more about his moving quickly than his beloved wife of 60 years, Paula.

Now Paula, as surely everyone knows, is a great baker, and there is almost never a Sunday that goes by when one of her Tupperware cake pans with the lid and handle does not appear in the kitchen filled with cake for coffee hour, usually with chocolate icing. Believe me, I know that chocolate icing. It is found everywhere by the end of coffee hour on Sundays. So, just I can't think of Jim without Paula, I can't think of Jim without carrying that Tupperware cake pan into church every Sunday, so I conclude with this story of dessert and the afterlife for the saint now with God.

Growing up in Lancaster, PA, where dessert was as integral to a meal as coffee hour is to church at Emmanuel, I would look forward to the words, "Keep your fork." Of course, that meant that dessert was coming. And not just a cup of Jell-O or pudding or even a dish of homemade ice cream –you don't need a fork for that. It meant the really good stuff – like the chocolate cake Paula so often makes for Emmanuel coffee hour. When my Mother said that, "Keep my fork," I knew the best was yet to come!

That's exactly what we can say now to Jim. "Jim, did you keep the fork? Because the best has come!" This long life you have lived so fully, of which we have been privileged to be a part of, has been a journey to the Messiah's banquet on the heavenly mountain of God. Where, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'there will be feast of rich foods and death will be swallowed up. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, there will be no mourning,

instead celebration for the kingdom for which we have waited - dessert and all.

Yes, God has invited each one of us to his Son's wedding feast, the banquet where Christ is the host, the fullness of God's life in the resurrection. So Jim, this is Anita, or as you sometimes called me when you saw me across the hospital room, "the Boss," talking. We know you saved your fork, for the best has now come for you. We know, and will hear the choir – YOUR choir – sing these words of faithfulness, that you so lived in your life, and to God's kingdom where you have been called. We will hear sung for you by your choir,

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee.

The darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day.

The darkness and the light to thee are both alike.

God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

O let my soul live and it shall praise thee.

For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory for ever more.

Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee.

Shine on Jim – there is no darkness for you, but light eternal with the God you so faithfully followed in this life. So, for us, there are no goodbyes, rather "See you later... in heaven." YOU have fought the good fight, YOU have finished the race, YOU have kept the faith." Our lives have been immeasurably blessed by your service, dear Jim. Now shine on with Gove in heaven forever.
AMEN