

SERMON AT THE BURIAL OF THE REVEREND DAVID POWERS 9/9/2025

The Right Reverend Russell Kendrick

Some people can be described by the adage...what you see is what you get....
but not today...that could not be further from the truth when it comes to describing David.

What I mean...is that David was a very multi-faceted guy....

he lived a life marked by an intensity & passion & generosity.....that is rare
& his faith in God was like that too.....David was a deep thinker...a deep believer....
w/ a bit of a mystical bent.....

he drank deeply of life...& all that happened to him...& a lot happened to him.

There is a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke that has been swirling in my mind

as I have thought about David and this moment together....It goes like this:

God speaks to each of us as he makes us, then walks with us silently out of the night.

These are the words we dimly hear: You, sent out beyond your recall,

go to the limits of your longing. Embody me.

Flare up like a flame and make big shadows I can move in.

Let everything happen to you: beauty & terror. Just keep going. No feeling is final.

Don't let yourself lose me.

Nearby is the country they call life. You will know it by its seriousness. Give me your hand.

”...go to the limits of your longing. Let everything happen to you---beauty & terror.

Just keep going. Don't let yourself lose me.”

David knew both the beauty & terror of life...and he went to the limits of longing...

David experienced much beauty in life...esp the beauty of music...listening to it...& making it
chiefly the music he made on his beloved stand up bass..... Madam Queen

I am not a musician...so I googled stand-up bass....this is what I found...

*It plays the notes so deep that u don't just hear them...u feel them in your soul
& those deep notes are what holds the rest of the music together...*

That sounds a lot like the David I knew

David & Madam Queen made a lot of music together....

including playing in a bohemian jazz band while in college in Georgia

as he put it....we were paid more in moonshine....than money...

but he did meet Ray Charles at one particular gig.....

He also knew the beauty of mischief...that was manifest in his devilish grin....

I saw it a few times even when I was preaching.....& it always made me wonder...

just what was he thinking....or about to say...or do

Sometimes that devilish grin gave way to full-blown mischief...like this memory
of Jonathan...who proudly claims the same devilish grin as his Dad

In the mid 80s we had a 4-door Mazda w/ a manual transmission. To prank Dad...

I climbed into the trunk from the back seat. My brother David was in the front seat.

Dad figured out where I was when he got in the car. He reversed the prank.

For that short trip, he was a rally race driver, red-lining the engine

& torquing the steering wheel side-to-side.

He tossed me around in trunk like a loose 2-liter bottle...I had a blast. He had a blast.

At the end of the trip, grinning he whispered to David, "Don't tell your mother".

David knew the beauty of friendship & family...yall made some good memories together
from Peter Pan haircuts to Poster putty---from wrestling on the floor to bailing you out...

Maybe most of all...David knew the beauty of resurrection

in this life....here & now....in the deep love he found w/ Celeste...

Celeste....your love for David & ur 4 children is amazing

Madam Queen might have been his first lady...but you were David's true love...

Indeed David knew the beauty of life....but he also knew terror...

incl the terror of grief that shook him to the core...the terror of living

thru great heartbreak & yet....to keep going...imagine coming out of seminary

as a single parent w/ 3 young children...& keeping his family together

He also knew the terror of war....when he went to the limits of his longing...

he did not lose God....but it wasn't easy...

Since we are here to remember a preacher...lets let the preacher preach.....

listen to how David himself described his experience & its effect on his faith

David is talking here of a shift in his faith in God....while in Vietnam...

a day he was strapped into the gunner's seat in a helicopter...

during a battle in which he realized he had killed someone....

There was no resolution to my moral anguish & no absolution...& so my pilgrimage began.

As Jacob wrestled w/ the angel at Penu-el, I wrestled w/ my angel...

only his was the angel of God....& mine was the angel of death who seemed

infinitely more powerful and real than the God of my Sunday School and culture.

I had what is now called a "paradigm" shift. The old rules about life didn't fit...

*I had to find a God bigger than one who could not lift me or **not** help me*

face the ease with which I could kill or be killed.

Wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this body of death.

Bach's Sonata & Fugue unresolved...Passion gone awry...my pilgrimage had begun

All this beauty & terror...helped David embody God as one of the finest priests I've known.

Psalm 139 reminds us that there is no place we can go where God is not.

"If I make the grave my bed, you are there."

By the time he was ordained...David had been to the depths,

& yet he found God there...so he could help others find God

He knew that X was present even in the darkest places — including the grave.

b/c of that...he could tell others that the darkness would not have the last word.

He was that priest who could sit in the ashes w/ those who grieve & guide them

incl leading this congregation thru its own wounds & into new life

And too David was also not afraid to flare up like a flame....for what he believed in

especially when that came to accepting & embracing people different from himself

he was a bridge builder.....b/t races & religions...b/t broken people in broken churches.

The gift of his priesthood was not that he had all the answers

but that he was willing to stand w/ others in the middle of the hard questions...&he did so

from the swamps of southern GA...to the cajun trail in LA...to the redneck riviera of S AL

Again lets let the preacher preach...

this is a story that was a favorite's of David's to tell....it also tells of him....

A young art museum attendant noticed that every day an old man would show up

& sit on the same bench. The bench faced a large black & white photo

of the famous Cellist Pablo Cassals who's back faced the camera as he played.

Curious about the daily ritual...the attendant asked the old man why he did this.

The old man replied "Be quiet....Can't you see, I am listening to the music."

On the same sheet of paper that held this story...

there was a snippet of a poem by William Blake that tells of the music.....

to see a world in a grain of sand....And heaven in a wild flower,

Hold infinity in the palm of your hand.....And eternity in an hour.

There it is....the music David was always listening for.....David's greatest longing.....

amidst all the beauty & terror.....amidst everything that happened to him...

David was always listening...always living...always longing

for eternity...heaven...right here...right now....

“Do you believe?”...Jesus asks of Martha in this Gospel...right here...right now....
Remember Martha is dealing w/ the terror of her brother’s death...
& yet she holds on....before any miracle happens...standing at her brother’s grave
she holds on....”yes Lord I believe....”

But just what does she believe?....
maybe Martha’s yes...was not a confident cheeras much as an earnest longing
w/o fully knowing what Jesus meant...not fully knowing what she was saying...Martha says yes

“David do you believe?”
Like Martha...David held on too...amid all the beauty & the terror he held on

And today...Bach’s sonata & fuge is resolved
what he listened for...he knows fully...what he believed...he now beholds...he is free

So let us give thanks to God for David.....& his yes....to a life so deeply and fully lived...
let us give thanks for all that made up the music of his life....
lets us give thanks for his yes to God...

And even now....as we stand at David’s grave.....lets us dare to say yes too....
to not only listen for the music of eternity.....
but to also make this music in our lives...right here...right now
& let us even dare to make music at the grave
as we sing our song....Alleluia...Alleluia...Alleluia