

Meditation on the Life of JDP Jr.

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November 4, 2017

Psalm 16:

Lord you are my portion and my cup.

It is you who uphold my lot.

My boundaries enclose a pleasant land.

Indeed I have a goodly heritage.

I will bless the Lord, who gives me counsel,

My heart teaches me, night after night.

I have set the Lord always before me;

Because he is at my right hand, I shall not fall.

My heart therefore is glad, and my spirit rejoices

My body also shall rest in hope.

For you will not abandon me to the grave,

Nor let your holy one see the Pit.

You will show me the path of life.

In your presence there is fullness of joy.

And in your right hand are pleasures for evermore.

I'd like to offer some brief framing remarks for our time together today. I base them on words taken from the psalm we just read, psalm 16.

You may know that the psalms, part of Hebrew Scriptures, were a compendium of hymns to God. They covered a whole range of emotions- anger, wrath, sorrow born of tribulation, joy, celebration, thanksgiving- all expressions of the range of emotions that were part of the Israelite experience, and more generally, of the human condition. They were honest expressions to God of life in all its complexity.

This particular psalm- psalm 16- was, at its root, a plea to God for protection and refuge, for trust in the goodness and care of God. It expressed the hope that, even in times of trouble, one would be held by an unwavering hope and trust in the goodness of God, that one might live with fullness of joy.

These sentiments, it seems to me, are a fitting encapsulation of Dick's life.

Today, I'd like to focus on one particular verse from the psalm: "My boundaries enclose a pleasant land; indeed I have a goodly heritage."

In my mind, this captures the life and legacy of Dick. His boundaries enclosed a pleasant land.

He lived a deep, rich and full life, one whose boundaries enclosed a pleasant land.

On a literal, physical level, it was the pleasant land of home and the places he loved:

Laurinburg, where he grew up; Montreat in the mountains, where he played as a boy and visited the rest of his life; the beach, a haven to him and Jean.

I have so many fond memories spending time with Dick and Jean at Log Haven, their cabin in the mountains. And of taking long hikes with them.

Dick always had a ritual of documenting these hikes. Somewhere along the way, he'd carefully select a big lichen from the side of a tree or a stump. And when the rest of us were eating our lunch or taking a rest, he'd quietly, neatly, get to work on carving into the lichen where we'd been and who'd come along. There was Pinnacle and Big Butt and Craggy Gardens. And Dick and Jean, Jonnie, Whaley, Leonard, Helen and Joe. The lichens still sit right there on the mantel at Log Haven: a testament to his love of the particularity of place and the people he held dear.

And there was also the beach and happy times spent there: Dick sitting over his tackle box for hours looking at all the different lures and figuring out which one to use; or Dick standing in the surf, casting his line, while the busyness of our chasing our kids or lying in the sun or building sand castles went on close by.

I always thought maybe he was fleeing- in some existential way- all the hoopla, but that he liked having it near at hand. I also remember him sitting out on the deck overlooking the marsh, no words spoken; just looking out and taking it all in.

And of him womping up "proper" breakfasts for everyone- bacon, and sausage- and not just any sausage but from some sacred place out in the country- and grits and eggs and toast. Just about as soon as we'd had the last bite of breakfast, he'd begin thinking about what we were going to have for dinner, what kind of fish to get and what would go with it.

Happy times indeed. And in no small part because of his and Jean's hospitality and welcome; and their simple love of living life. Their boundaries together so clearly enclosed a pleasant land. And we got to stand in it.

I'd be remiss if I didn't also mention the boundaries of this good land of ours- this country, and the love and respect Dick had for it. He fought for it quite literally on the battlefield- and I have no doubt that this impacted his deep love and appreciation for it. He returned home from WWII and spent the rest of his life working to uphold all that is good and honorable and decent about this land. This flag and what's written about it in your bulletin says all that really needs to be said here.

His boundaries, though, were not simply of place. They were of people; the two were always intertwined.

I can hardly speak of Dick without also speaking of Jean and their marriage: it was always and only one of abiding dedication and love for one another. And then there were the deep and lasting friendships they shared with the Sutherlands, the McCoys, the Johns: Summer vacations spent together at Sunset Beach that continue today with later generations- what's affectionately called the August meeting.

And the New Year's Oyster Roasts, the winter trips to Florida with a tightly prescribed picnic meal at the same location every year for the first day on the road. There was such an abiding commitment to friends and to sharing good times together. I've always said to Dickson that he had the great good fortune to grow up with more than one family. It was all about commitment, unwavering loyalty, abiding affection. And that extended well beyond their close inner circle.

Even in later years, when Dick was not all of what he'd once been, these qualities endured. All that met him, loved him. I think especially of his caregivers and the people at the Exxon gas station down the road. As Dickson said, they were all fellow pilgrims.

This day, as we hear stories told, words from scripture, hymns and music and prayers, my hope is that it might set us in a pleasant land. That's what Dick would want, I feel sure. And that his good life, and all that he held dear, might in some small way shape our own, might help us cultivate and enclose pleasant land ourselves all the days of our lives.

As we move through this time together, let us offer our thanks to God for being able to stand in such pleasant land with Dick for a good long while on this earth.

And let us pray that in ways beyond our knowing, God will continue to lead Dick beside the still waters, to lie down with him in the green pastures, to walk with him, even through the valley of the shadow of death, that he may he dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen.