

**On October 13, 2010, The Rev. Herluf Matthias Jensen, Bishop of the New Jersey Synod in the LCA and the ELCA from 1978 to 1991 died at his home in Moorestown. A Funeral liturgy for Pastor Jensen was held at St. Matthew's Lutheran Church, Moorestown, on Sunday, October 17. The sermon for that liturgy is printed below. Herluf was a pastor, colleague, mentor, and dear friend to many on this territory. He is deeply missed. *Rest eternal grant him, O Lord; and let light perpetual shine upon him.***

**2 Corinthians 2: 5-11**

**I Peter 2: 5-14**

**John 1: 1-18**

I don't think I have ever met anyone else like Herluf Jensen. And, I suspect that I am not the only one in this room who might say that.

- At home in Iowa and in New Jersey.
- A classically educated scholar and a tennis player.
- A World War II infantryman and a bishop of the church.
- A decorated veteran, awarded the Bronze Star for heroism and valor in combat, and a passionate opponent of war in all of its forms.
- A theologian of the church and a grandfather (and Martin Luther would be the first to say that combination works all day long).
- An honored and revered voice in the coalition of religious leaders and ecumenical councils, and a humility that sometimes hid his presence in the room.
- An organizer of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee in the 1960s and a marcher with Martin Luther King, Jr., and in the same decade a member of the Church Council at Nativity in East Brunswick.
- A visionary for urban church and public advocacy, and a sometimes discouraged realist about the state of the church's mission.
- Herluf didn't just champion the idea of women in ordained ministry, he insisted that it become a reality in your congregation and mine.
- A lover of Danish delicacies I cannot even pronounce, and addicted to cigarettes.
- With Dot a host of backyard garden parties to support ministry in next-door Camden, and an official visitor to the church in Russia and El Salvador and Bolivia.

Ten years a parish pastor here at St. Matthew's in Moorestown, thirteen years a bishop, eighty-seven years a redeemed child of God. I don't think I have ever met anyone else like Herluf Jensen. I suspect that I am not the only one in this room who might say that. But whoever he was for us – husband, father, grandfather, pastor, bishop, colleague, friend, theologian, brother in Christ – whoever he was for us, we have been blessed along the way in our journey together.

Herluf picked these lessons for us to hear today. It would have been good if he would have left the preacher a guide for the intended message. The lesson from 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians on a first reading is darn near inscrutable! It's as if we have been dropped into the middle of a situation and a conversation... and we have been, intentionally I think. The only way to figure this out is to read almost the whole second letter to the church at Corinth. There we are reminded that the church was in conflict, and St. Paul himself had been a target, causing Paul to send some very stern communications to the Corinthians.

The community seems to have pulled together and disciplined the offending party, and now Paul is making it clear that forgiveness and reconciliation must be the order of the day, especially for the sake of the one who has offended:

*so now, Paul writes, you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him.*

Contrast that troubled picture of the church in conflict (our all too often circumstance as bishops know all too well), contrast that picture with the vision for the church in the First Letter of Peter:

*...like living stones let yourselves be built into a spiritual house...*

*...you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you might proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

What a difference between the vision and the Corinthian church reality!

In those precious, too-few times when Herluf and Dot and Peter and I would be sitting around the kitchen table in conversation, almost all of Herluf's questions were about the state of the church. His love for this church was so deep, and so much of his life was poured into it. The conflicts were always tragedies and he so lamented them. So it is no surprise that Herluf lifts up these texts for us, no doubt with an eye toward St. Paul's stirring exhortation to the church later in the same letter:

*From now on, Paul writes, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way.*

*So, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!*

This is resurrection here and now! The new creation has begun among us, Paul says. The promise is coming true now, even as it is fulfilled in eternal life.

*All this is from God, Paul continues, who reconciled us to God-self through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, ...that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.*

This is how the royal priesthood, the holy nation, God's own people, this is how we look on the ground: servants, infantry, ambassadors entrusted with the message of reconciliation. A church together in God's mission...and the fountain of the mission is the Gospel!

The Gospel:

*In the beginning was the Word, and the word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*

*What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people.*

*The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.*

This is not a frequent text in funeral services. It is a Christmas text, and it reminds me of Herluf's Christmas letters as bishop to the leaders of the church, especially the parish pastors. In letters that would usually arrive just days before Christmas Eve, Herluf would weave this unspoken question into a page of lines and verses: *How, dear pastor, will you lift this birth-event that is so crassly observed and co-opted by a consumer culture – how will you lift up a witness to the cosmic, yet deeply personal impact of the thing that has happened in Bethlehem, the birth of Jesus the Savior, God come to earth!? How will you proclaim the Gospel on that holy night?*

On top of that implicit question Herluf would fill those letters with verses and extraneous lines from T.S. Eliot, Camus, Tolstoy, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Martin Marty, W. H. Auden, (the list goes on and on), sometimes mysterious verses, seemingly impenetrable lines, written to inspire us to think, to think deeply, to be immersed in the depth and breadth and richness of what the Gospel proclaims, and to be moved by it... changed by it...so that the church might be moved by it, changed by it, transformed...and the Gospel take its course through us into the world.

***The Word became flesh, and lived among us, and we have seen his glory,  
the glory of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.  
From his fullness, John proclaims, we have all received grace upon grace.***

So John's version of the Christmas story doesn't begin with shepherds in the field tending their flocks by night and angel choirs. For John this was not just a moment in Bethlehem of Judea. This was a cosmic event, an event larger than this world, because the Creator of this world had come to visit. The One who was in the beginning, the Word with a capital "W", the One who spoke and then watched heaven separate from earth, oceans form, and life bubble into being, that Word by whom all things were made, that ***Word became flesh***, John says, ***and lived among us***. His name was Jesus, but his identity is Christ of God!

*Preacher, can you see it?* Herluf would ask. *Can you see the depth and the breadth and the richness of this Gospel mystery?* If you can plumb those depths of theology and see the mystery - not understand the mystery - but see it and believe that it is of grace unbounded, grace upon grace that is not deterred even by a cross, and cannot be shaken even in death... that grace of God in Jesus Christ will be the source of our hope and our joy in every day, and especially on a day such as this.

The One who was crucified was raised from the dead, and because Christ lives, we shall live also. It is in that spirit of hope and confidence that Herluf ended the last of his Christmas letters to us, Christmas before last. This is what he wrote:

*I close this Christmas greeting with some words from Psalm 71:  
"And now that I am old and gray headed, O God, do not forsake me,  
Till I make known your strength to this generation  
And your power to all who are to come.*

***Your righteousness, O God, reaches to the heavens;  
You have done great things; Who is like you, O God?  
You have showed me great troubles and adversities,  
But you will restore my life  
And bring me up again from the deep places of the earth."***

"And now that I am old and gray headed, O God, do not forsake me, till I make known your strength to this generation and your power to all who are to come."

Herluf did his part. ***Well done, good and faithful servant. Thanks be to God.***

***Bishop E. Roy Riley  
October 17, 2010, St. Matthew's, Moorestown***