

A sermon preached at the funeral of William H. Boornazian
 at Trinity Episcopal Church, Wethersfield, CT.
 on January 19, 2026 by The Rt. Rev. Gordon Scruton

Scripture readings: Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33; Psalm 23; 1 John 4:7-12; John 14: 1-6

+++++

All of us are grateful to you, Brian, for sharing a few of your stories about your beloved Dad. Everyone here who knew Bill has more stories we could share about him. Have you noticed that the longer a person lives, the more stories there are to tell about people we love?

Bill's parents, siblings and lifelong friends who are no longer with us in person, could tell one set of stories about Bill.

His children have stories about growing up at home with Bill as their Dad, ...then about the Bill they experienced as they were adults and had spouses and children. They have stories about being with Bill since his beloved wife Marion died, and being with him in the last weeks and last hours of his life.

And his grandchildren, nieces and nephews also have stories. His work colleagues and many friends over the years, his sports buddies, all have stories to tell of their relationship with Bill.

Bill's life was rich in relationships and he will continue to live on in the stories and memories of those who loved him and delighted in their relationship with him.

God created each of us to be as unique as our fingerprints. We all touch the lives of others and leave the imprint of our attitudes, words and actions, our unique habits, humor, and smiles. And God did not create any perfect people, for we all, like Bill have our quirks, our strengths and our weaknesses, our positive and negative traits. Fortunately, God loves the full package of who we are and invites us to keep learning and growing for as long as we live, to become the people God created us to become.

Over the years I've been blessed to know many wonderful Armenian people in parishes I served. One of the first things they always asked me was, did I know that Armenia was the first Christian nation in the world? I was delighted this past week, when Brian was telling me about his Dad, he asked me the same question. He learned to do that from his Dad who was proud of his Armenian Christian heritage.

Brian told me about how, as a young man with a young family, Bill gave of himself to God and others by serving as the lay leader of an Episcopal Church in Hartford where many Armenian families were part of the congregation. Bill's faith was not only a cultural heritage of his background, but also a very personal source of grounding for him throughout his life. Although he was not a man to talk a lot about his faith, worship with a Christian community was an important spiritual practice he continued throughout his life. This parish was a place he came to receive the Eucharist and to find the spiritual strength and support that he knew he needed. This is where I met him both before and after the death of his beloved Marion.

I hope that all of you will take some time today to recall your favorite Bill stories. And I hope you will make the time to share with others in the coming days, and years, some of your stories about what you have appreciated most about Bill. A wonderful way to begin sharing and learning more about the legacy of Bill's life is to come to the reception after Bill's burial today, to which the family, in true Armenian hospitality, invites all of you. Listening to the Bill stories of others and sharing our Bill stories helps us with our grief and enriches the treasure of Bill's presence in our lives and in the lives of others.

Today, along with our love and gratitude for Bill, we also bring our grief and a deep sense of the loss of someone who has been so special in our lives. We are just beginning to feel what his loss will mean to us. What will you miss most about Bill? What is it like now that both Bill and Marion, who were a solid foundation for so many folks, for so many years, to no longer be with us?

Bill's passing reminds us that we are all born into a journey through the cycle of life, from birth to growing up, to aging and dying. In our youth and in the middle of our lives we are focused on each day, focused on what we will do next. But as we age, we begin to realize that our lives, and the lives of all those we love will end someday. Because God created us to live in this cycle of life, we have to learn from our Creator how to deal with death and loss of loved ones. I wonder what wisdom Bill would have shared with us about how to deal with death and loss? He experienced many deaths and losses over his lifetime, yet somehow all those painful losses did not stop him from loving and appreciating the little joys of life each day.

A few minutes ago, we read together the 23rd Psalm. Probably Bill would have memorized that Psalm as a little boy, because that is what children were taught in those days. And he probably heard that Psalm read at many funerals he attended throughout his life. That ancient poetry shows us how our ancestors for centuries have come to understand the cycle of life and death.

The Psalm begins by remembering that our Creator cares about all of us as a shepherd cares for his flock of sheep. Each one is precious. Because the Lord is our shepherd, we shall not be in want, in other words, we have everything that we need to walk through whatever is going on in our lives. Our Creator is close to us, deep within us always, nourishing us with the strength and guidance we need, restoring us when we feel exhausted and overwhelmed.

Even when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, as we are today, we don't need to fear evil, don't need to feel that we'll be overwhelmed, because our loving Creator Shepherd and guide is with us and will provide what we need for the next steps of our journey.

The Psalm does not pretend to imply that it is always easy to recognize and follow God's guidance. Life can be difficult; it involves suffering and struggle. It takes time to learn how to let go of trying to control everyone and everything...and let God guide us. At times we get focused on ourselves, our problems and forget that God is with us and loves us. At times we have our doubts and fears.

Yet nothing can stop the God who created us in love from continuing to love us and walk alongside us. Part of the journey of life is learning how to be aware of, how to learn from and be guided by this Spirit of God who dwells within us from our birth. We learn by the examples of others,

by conversations with others, by being part of a community of faith, family and friends who share their experiences with God and life with us and support us in our journey through life.

The Psalm ends by saying, surely God's goodness and mercy shall follow along with us all the days of our lives and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. What would it mean to dwell in the house of the Lord forever? Whenever a loved one dies, every human being instinctively asks, I wonder what happens after we die? Every society and religion wrestles with this question.

In the gospel reading the family chose for today, Jesus is trying to prepare his friends for his upcoming death. He said, in my Father's house are many dwelling places, many rooms. I will die soon and go to prepare a place for you after your death. And one day I will welcome you home with me to the place I have prepared for you. His disciples, like most of us said, we don't understand what you are saying, Jesus. How do we know the way into this new life with you on the other side of death? Jesus said, I am the way, I will show you the way. Keep listening to my Spirit, that I have given to you, when I created you. I will guide you and show you the way.

So, the Spirit of God that guided Bill through every step of his journey through life here on earth, will continue to guide him into all the unknowns of his next season of life with God in heaven. Just as a baby can't imagine what his or her life will be like when they emerge from their mother's womb, so while we live in this world, we are like babies in the womb of God's love in our understanding of life after death. We can't imagine what it will be like. But as we experience God guiding us through our lives, as Bill did, we can trust that our loving Creator will continue to guide us with love into the next season of our lives, with God and all those who have died and gone before us, in the communion of saints.

Today, we give thanks to God for putting Bill in our lives and we will commend him to God's continuing love and care, trusting that God's love will continue to surround him and guide him as he continues to live with love for God, for Marion and all the saints who have gone before him into the next season of his life.

May God help all of us, each in our own unique ways, to keep learning more of what God created us to learn about living with love for God and all our neighbors as we walk through the joys and struggles of our lives...until, through God's mercy and the power of Christ's resurrection from the dead, we too come to share the mastery of God's gift of life beyond death. Amen