

The Park Road Pulpit  
*Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church*  
Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

***Byron Alcy Hamrick, Jr.***  
*A Eulogy*  
Russ Dean, November 8, 2002

Byron Hamrick loved work. It pulsed with every beat of his heart. It soared higher with every breath he drew. It flowed, rich and free, in the blood that coursed through his veins. Work defined him. Because of this, he represents the very best that this country has ever had to offer. Byron was the quintessential American man: Strong. Independent. Wise. Honest. Faithful. Industrious. He was a part of that generation, called the greatest. It is a generation well-named, for they have made us who we are: a people with a proud heritage, and a profound hope.

No one ever enjoyed work like Byron Hamrick. He was, by his own estimation, the best engineer in Charlotte. He might be the only person I know for whom “work-aholism” was not a sin!, because engineering was more than his career. It was his calling. His passion as well as his pastime. He was known and respected widely. He was a leader whose commitment to hard work and whose proven record of quality made him a mentor for colleagues around the country.

At the office, he worked. At home, he worked. On vacation, he worked. In retirement, he worked. In the hospital, he worked. Even in the CCU he demanded a telephone, his briefcase, and his little black book. Last week he was still reading the daily paper and studying blueprints. But for Byron, this wasn't a job. It was his life.

There was *only one thing* more important to Byron than his life as an engineer, and that was his life as a son and brother, his *job* as husband, a father, his career as a “PawPaw.” The same conviction that he poured into his work, he poured into his family. You can tell it just by hearing them talk about him. I don’t know how it is *possible* to build the kind of family that Byron built, given his commitment to his career, but all you have to do is ask three children and five grandchildren, and the evidence of this conviction pours out in warm tears and rich laughter. There is no trace of bitterness, no hint of regret in their voices as they talk about their father, the overachiever engineer, because Byron was always home for dinner! (What a great example for my generation.)

Here are a few word pictures for you who knew him best:

“South 21” fried chicken and a day at the lake;  
 “Tickle Nights,” Star Trek, and Taco Bell;  
 Fireworks;  
 All-night fishing;  
 Hamrick Family Reunions;  
 Saturday workdays in the yard;  
 Learning to swim and to ski;  
 Wrestling on the floor;  
 Dancing on PawPaw’s feet;  
 Late-night games of Scrabble;  
 Coke Floats!;  
 Thanksgiving at Beach Mountain;  
 “Wait! Let me get the camera.”

Byron loved his family. He was strict, but kind. Frugal, but generous. *Stubborn* as an old mule, but a patient teacher who allowed his children to learn their own lessons. Grandma Hamrick used to say that there were only two ways to do anything -- “Byron’s way. And the *wrong way!*” And his children attest that after they had tried it *their* way, they usually came back to what he had suggested in the first place! Byron was a “family man,” but his heart was large enough for family who did not share his blood: a son-in-law

and friends of his children for whom Byron also became a father. He was a friend of his children's friends.

Mike. Brandon, Adam, and Chase. Susan. Luann and John. Natalie and Laura. You are the best awards he ever earned. You learned from his wisdom. You grew in his strength. His legacy will live in you. For making him so proud, and for being there to the bitter end, I say to you all, "Well done, good and faithful children. Well done."

If my math is right, one day in 1952, an eleventh grader at Gastonia High School noticed a cute, new "Hall Monitor" as he hurried to chemistry class. When class started, Byron noticed that she was there, too. Later, he found himself riding the bus across town to study with her. (They were trying to get their chemistry right!) Still later, Gwen and Byron could be found slipping out of First Baptist Church a little early to make it to the drive in theatre on time. They learned to dance together. They learned to play cards together. They learned to travel together. They learned to raise a family together. They learned to share life together: "in *sickness* and in health." It's been fifty years since those study sessions, Gwen. It think it's safe to say, the chemistry worked!

Your lives have been filled with the best that Grace can offer: health, happiness, prosperity, children, and more friends than any two people deserve to have. Byron affectionately called the closest of these friends, "The 12-Pack." The group had its genesis in 1958, and nearly every Friday night since, Jo and Doug, Sharon and John, Ann and Van, Iris and Ed, Pat and John, and Byron and Gwen have been together. What an incredible story of friendship. Frequently in our visits with Byron, one of these friends, or one of his many colleagues from work would be there, and though Byron seldom

*admitted* to needing *anything* – he has needed you all. And you have all been there for him. “Well done.”

There is a theme connecting the three pieces of Byron’s life: his career, his family, his friends. And this is no accident, for *success* does not just happen. *Families* do not stay together just because they should. And lasting *friendship* is never a simple coincidence. You see, Byron Hamrick loved work. It pulsed with every beat of his heart. It soared higher with every breath he drew. It flowed, rich and free, in the blood that coursed through his veins. Work defined him.

Nowhere was this any more evident than in his dying. Byron entered the hospital on February 21<sup>st</sup>, and for nine months gave his life’s greatest effort. It was work. Every single minute. Last week, after life’s ultimate inevitability became his disappointing reality, Byron asked his cardiologist, Dr. David Dowdy, “Was it worth it?” (The businessman was still evaluating, calculating.) The answer? From a doctor, and a preacher, a resounding, “Yes,” for Byron’s greatest achievement in life is *not* a mechanical project or story of entrepreneurial success; it is not even the *family* and friends that gave him such pride. Byron’s greatest achievement in life is that in life and in death his *work* touched us all. Everyone who knew Byron learned from him. And *this* is the lesson he taught us: Life is work. And the work makes it Joyous.

Somewhere, deep within every human, in a mysterious place no stethoscope will ever hear, a holy place no electronic scan will ever see, somewhere beyond the complex physical nature of our being, there is a voice, a light. It is the source of our life.

And in Byron Alcy Hamrick, Jr., that voice spoke, strong. That light shone, bright, to the very end. I said to him this week, “The doctors have done all they can do, Byron. Are you at peace with this?” There was no resentment in his voice when he spoke. He was at peace with himself and with his God, but what he said was, “I guess there ain’t much I can do about it, is there?” You see, dying was not in Byron’s schedule for this year. He still had too much work to do. Byron had a file for everything. He did not keep a file on “death.” He still had too much life to live.

Just moments after Byron died, I shared a few lines of a poem with Luann and Susan. I would like to close now with these words from Dylan Thomas.

Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Though wise men at their end know dark is right,  
Because their words had forked no lightning they  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright  
Their frail deeds might have danced in a green bay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Wild men who caught and sang the sun in flight,  
And learn, too late, they grieved it on its way,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.

Grave men, near death, who see with blinding sight  
Blind eyes could blaze like meteors and be gay,  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

And you, my father, there on the sad height,  
Curse, bless, me now with your fierce tears, I pray,  
Do not go gentle into that good night.  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.

Byron Hamrick raged against the dying of the light, because he loved work. And his Christian hope is ours today: Byron's work, the life he lived so well, will never, ever die.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Gracious God,  
 who worked for six days  
 making the stars above us,  
 and the cells within us

We pause this day to celebrate  
 the diversity, the beauty, the mystery  
 of the work of Your life  
 among us,  
 within us.

We pause this day to celebrate  
 your handiwork in Byron Hamrick:  
 son, brother,  
 husband, father, grandfather,  
 colleague, friend.

Make us better this day, O God,  
 more aware of the *gift* of life,  
 more available for the *work* of life  
 because of Byron's tireless example among us.

To his family, he was a foundation of strength and wisdom,  
 To his friends, a core of commitment and joy,  
 To us all, as we celebrate his life, let Byron be a reminder  
 of that which was his sure foundation,  
 of the one who was the core of his faith.

Remind us today of your Love, O God,  
 made evident in Jesus Christ, who says to all,  
 "Come unto me, all ye who labor and are heavy laden,  
 and I will give you rest."

Gracious God,  
 who worked for six days  
 and who *rested* on the seventh,  
 give Sabbath rest, even now, we pray  
 To Byron,  
 To his family. To his friends and colleagues.  
 That we might all share in Byron's work  
 And experience your peace, today.

May it be so, Amen!