

Eulogy for Paul Frye

Paul Frye was a lucky man. Those words might seem an inappropriate way to characterize the life of someone so gifted and so full of life, yet diagnosed with stage-four cancer in his early fifties. They might seem callous in reference to someone who battled that enemy for six long years. They might seem especially out of place, today. But these are not my words. Two weeks ago I sat by Paul's bed, with Judy and Meredith also at his side, and I listened in amazement. There may have been anger, frustration, bitterness early in his struggle -- knowing who Paul was, that must have been the case -- but not on that day. I felt as if I were listening to Lou Gehrig's famous speech -- "today I feel like the luckiest man alive."

But I listened, and I know that in some ways, he is right. Paul Frye was a lucky man, because he has one beautiful daughter who had made him very proud. You could see it in his face, a glint still there, even in weakened eyes. Still daddy's girl! I know there were days, Meredith, when Paul didn't feel so lucky to be your Dad. (Nor you, to be his daughter!) Days when the exuberance of youth and the restraint of Fatherhood clashed. Days when the strong will of a young woman and the stubborn streak of the old man who gave that genetic disposition almost came to blows. It's called "growing up" -- and it happens to us all -- children and their parents! Those days you have, now, to smile about -- because such frustrations are born in the crucible of freedom and love. He loved you, Meredith. He was excited about what you have done. He was proud of who you are. And he will continue to live, for, as luck would have it, he lives on, in you. Remember his humor. Remember his hard work. Remember his love. And he will never die.

Paul Frye was a lucky man, because before there was a beautiful daughter, there was another beautiful girl. They met in high school, and more than thirty-five years ago, she swept him off his feet in one great “I do.” Judy and Paul have been “I doing” ever since. You have built a lifetime of laughter and love. Hold on to these, Judy. They will last another lifetime. “Don’t tell her,” he said with a wink in his eye (Judy was sitting there), “but I consider myself lucky to have found Judy and to have talked her into marrying me.” At that altar, Judy said “in sickness and in health,” and she has been good to her word. Judy, Paul was lucky to find one such as you, and you have been there. Well done, good and faithful servant. Faithfulness, which you have displayed so well, especially in these last months, is what makes marriage survive in a day when so few marriages do. Well done.

Paul Frye was a lucky man because he had a good job that he loved. He loved the variety. He loved not being confined to an office. He loved the contact with people that his job gave him. Paul had worked with computers since 1967, and it is clear that somewhere along the way he had learned the value and the meaning of the word, “work.” He smiled when he told me he believed everyone ought to work, and just a half a day was enough -- any twelve hours would do! There was a mischievous grin, with a hint of confession in it when he suggested that one of his downfalls might be a bit of prejudice that he couldn’t quite shake. (Paul’s prejudice was that he thought everyone ought to be as he, and to work just that hard.) Well into the advance of his cancer, Paul was still driving to work. Despite the pain, and all of the inconveniences of his disease, he had a job to do. People were counting on him. And until the very end, his disposition of hard, faithful work, held true.

Paul Frye was a lucky man. He had a great family. He had a good job. And Paul also had a solid faith. It was his faith, that led him on a journey, that brought him here. To a different kind of church than that in which he was raised. But to a church which would become his family. Over and over again, he commended Park Road Baptist Church. His community of faith for 18 years, for your honesty, your community, your responsibility. To the members of the Babylons class, you must be noted, for you have been to Paul, in recent months, what church is. What church is. Community. Presence. Support. Thank you for being there. Paul could not say enough about you.

Paul was raised in the First Baptist Church of Salisbury, and he spoke fondly of his childhood Sunday School teacher, Mr. Stoker, who was dedicated to his boys, and who taught them to quote Luke 2.52: *And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and favor with God and man.* It is a verse that Paul took to heart, for he, too, grew. Like Jesus, in stature. Like Jesus, in wisdom. Like Jesus, in favor with those around him -- this trait was particularly notable in Paul in his great sense of humor. "Are we having fun, yet?" he loved to say, and with Paul, the answer was almost always, yes. He loved a good joke, whether you could tell it in church or not!

I believe humor is a grace of God and is given to those who have a mature sense of proportionality -- to those who understand the importance of all things, relative to that which really matters. Paul had a great sense of humor, and his laughter will be missed. Paul grew in wisdom and in stature and in human favor. And, like Jesus, Paul Frye grew, in favor with God.

At his bedside that day, Paul said to me, "I hate to go out like this." This isn't what I had planned." He wanted to see Meredith graduate. He wanted to take care of Judy. He had way too much work still to do to be sick. But, he said, not so much with a sense of resignation, I think, as with an acceptance born only in one who has grown in favor with God: "It's God's will."

Now, you don't change a man's theology at such a moment, so I did not disagree. But I do not believe Paul Frye's death was God's will, if we mean God's desire, or God's design, or God's intention, or God's action. No, Paul Frye was a lucky man, I believe. Too lucky for that kind of God. But in the depth of Paul's spirituality, at the heart of his favor with God, was his sense of humor, remember. His maturely developed sense of proportionality, which made laughing, even laughing at himself, possible. In this sense of proportionality, what I heard Paul saying was that in the grand scheme of things, his own 58 years, and even his own death, were just part of the grand picture, which is the great, Mystery of Life.

In that sense, some would say there is no such thing as luck. In the grand scheme of things, no blind, careless fate, no random and disconnected actions -- but only all things, working together, in the economy of the Providence of a Gracious God, all things working together, with God who is *above all and through all and in all...*

Paul Frye, lucky man?

Or Paul Frye, 58-year testimony to the presence and providence of a God of great mystery, a God of good life, a God of great humor?

You have come to the place today, because we all know the answer. Paul's life was not about luck at all. For Paul Frye, who loved life and lived so well, thanks be to God!

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Just as old, barren Sara, gave birth beyond her time,
and named her son, Isaac --
which means, "he laughs" --
re-name us today, O God, name us Isaac (or maybe Paul),
and teach us to number our days and apply our
hearts to the wisdom and favor which Paul Frye
came to know so well, in such a short life...

Give us his laughter, and your tears;
...his spirit of work, and your gift of rest;
...his happy luck, and the providence of your good grace;
Give us his death, to eternal life;
And your life, which will never, ever die.

We pray in the name of the Christ,
who is our resurrection
our life,
our eternal laughter,
Amen.