

A Good Word for Bill Walker  
November 20, 2006

Bill Walker was his own eulogy. As his son, Richard, said, we could simply say today, "This is a celebration of life well-lived. Amen." We could in fact say so, for Bill said in his 82 years of humble and faithful living all that needs to be said in praise of one man's life. Bill would be quite happy if I would sit down right now. But I will not. For these moments are not about Bill Walker, and for that he would be happy. These moments of worship are a celebration of the Grace of God, for the gathered people of God, and in days such as we live, when good words seem sometimes hard to find, when grace is in such dire need, the Church needs the faithful witness of a life that can stand as its own good word. Bill Walker's life was his eulogy: for his family, for his church, for his community, and, in the way that one man's life can have quiet reverberating effects far beyond his own, humble ability to imagine it, Bill's life was a good word for the world. His quiet goodness is now being shared by those he touched, and by those touched by those he touched... far, God only knows how far(!), from Walker's Ferry.

The Bill Walker you thought you knew, quiet, kind, humble, hard-working, dedicated, honest, faithful... this was Bill Walker. I've never heard a family talk with such honest admiration. Without pretense or braggadocio and without that anxious sense of telling the Pastor what they want him to hear (for fear that he'll otherwise say what he really knows to be true!), Bill's children and Marjory smiled and laughed their way through an hour's worth of conversation about a father and husband who was esteemed with highest praise.

Bill Walker was not a man of many words, but his life spoke volumes. He was not highly educated, but he was wise beyond measure. He was not a rich man, but he had

amassed great wealth. He was not pious, but his working, living faith, stands as a testimony to the presence of God, the continuing incarnate presence of the divine among us. He had little power, as the world counts influence and prestige, but he had unlocked the secret to the greatest force there is: Bill Walker knew how to love.

There is so much I could tell you. So much I should tell you. But Bill has already said it all. The life he lived was a gift to his family. Every child needs to have a father worthy of such deep admiration. The life he lived was a gift to his church. Until he became sick, he had never missed a day of church since Amy and I have been your pastors. He was here to worship, here on Mondays to count the money, here on Tuesdays to make the coffee for Bible study, here on Wednesday for fellowship, here on Thursday and Friday and Saturday if ever needed, and then back again on Sunday. The life he lived was a gift to his community. For years he went every Saturday to invite the children in the trailer park to church, and then he was there the next morning to pick them up. For eight years after his retirement he volunteered – volunteered 40 hours a week – at a retirement center. The life he lived was a gift to the world. He challenged his children to have their own faith, believed and lived in their own way. And as he grew older, instead of getting “more so” (as Amy’s dad used to say all old folks get), more set in their ways, the world narrowing in on their ideas, their beliefs, their way of thinking, Bill and Marjory grew more open to the world, day by day. More open to hear and be challenged, to continue learning and living a growing. In this openness, they shared the grace of God – not condemnation or judgment, but unconditional love and unfailing presence.

Bill was not afraid to die. When Marjory asked if there was anything he needed to talk about, he said, in his characteristically quiet fashion, “I’m fine.” As Ana said of her

father, "He lived well. And he died with dignity." What more could any of us ask for? What could speak more highly of human living than this? Bill lived well. Bill died with dignity.

The writer of the proverb rightly, wisely says, "*A good name is to be chosen above great riches.*" Bill Walker graced the earth with his good name. But what the scripture fails to make clear in this little verse, is that good names are not just ours for the choosing. Good names have to be earned by the lives we live.

Bill Walker had a good name, because he was his own eulogy.

For the good word of Bill Walker, thanks be to God!