A Good Word for Harold “Hoot” Brantley

December 7, 2018

On Tuesday of this week we met with Tom and Dave, Craig and Barbara, Kelly and Scott to plan today’s service. I took seven pages of notes to help with this eulogy, stories, memories, reflections. Two days later I got an outline from Craig about what he wanted to say about his father. The outline was two pages long and included 43 points, encompassing Hoot Brantley’s life and career and family and service! I walked through my notes, crossing out all that Craig was going to say… and there wasn’t a single thing left on all seven pages! Craig said his dad was a planner, that he always had everything ordered, planned, written down… I think the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree!

But I’m not disappointed. You have heard the stories, heard the “good word” about Hoot Brantley’s life, as you should have heard it, from a dedicated and loyal son. Anyone with a son that proud and so excited to share his father’s life does not need any professional clergy to pronounce a eulogy.

So in these moments I will not duplicate any of those stories. Thank you, Craig, for so beautifully sharing your dad’s life with us. What I want to do is to read between the lines of all those stories just a little. Every life is filled with stories. The question that really matters is… what’s behind the stories? What is at the center of the person at the center of the stories?

As one of Hoot’s pastors, reading between the lines of the stories of his life, four aspects stood out to me. The speak of the core of his character.

Hoot Brantley was faithful. He loved his family. He served his country. He stood by his friends. He supported his church. In a world filled with the frauds and the fakes and the faithless, Hoot stood as a shining example of what faithfulness can be and what it can mean to those touched by it.

Hoot had a sense of humor. He never took himself too seriously. When he renewed his driver’s license at 92 he walked out of the DMV and said, “See you in 7 years!” And during his last hospitalization, he told the nurse he needed three cans of Insure. When she told him she was sorry but she couldn’t bring him what he wanted, without missing a beat Hoot grinned, “Then, how about a beer!?” They say laughter is the best medicine. Surely Hoot’s humor was part of the secret of almost 97 years of good living.

Hoot was satisfied with his life. Someone has said, “Contentment is not the fulfillment of what you want but the realization of how much you already have.” Hoot worked hard and did well. He could have lived in a big house, driven a fancy car, bought expensive clothes. Maybe it was the Great Depression that taught him to be satisfied with frozen jelly beans, and that you ought to change your dry cleaner if the onc down the street would save you one penny per shirt! I cannot imagine Hoot Brantley’s life being made any better by material possessions. He couldn’t either, and he died a wealthy man – rich with joy, filled by all the right things.

And Hoot Brantley was proud. I don’t mean the “Pride (that) goeth before the fall.” I self-assured and self-aware. When he was sentenced to use a walker to help him get around, he told Amy he wasn’t coming to church any more, to let people pity him, looking like a frail old man. There was a dignity to his strength, a strength to Hoot’s dignity. When he had to stop coming to church, he accepted that. When it was time to stop driving, he gave up his keys, himself. He would wear that emergency button around his neck… but you could not have paid him to use it!

Hoot loved Old Blue Eyes, and Sinatra’s famous melody is often sung as a theme to a selfish pride, “I Did it My Way.” Hoot Brantley lived and died his way – but he was anything but selfish, haughty, prideful. Hoot was humbly proud, dignified and self-differentiated, which is just a fancy way of saying he could see himself as he really was, the good and the bad, the strength and the weakness.

If you asked Hoot how old he was, he could tell you, almost to the day. He missed 97 years by just a couple weeks. He knew because, as he liked to say, “It all counts.” The Psalmist said “*Teach us to number our days that we might apply our hearts to wisdom*” (Psalm 90.12).

Hoot numbered his days, because he knew, instinctively, that “It all counts.” Between the lines of the stories of his life there was substance, a well of deep integrity. It showed in his faithfulness, in his humor, in his contentment, and in his pride of bearing and being.

Yes, Hoot, “It all counts.” Yesterday, today, forever. So even today we celebrate.

For Hoot Brantley, Thanks be to God!