

***From a sermon preached in Saint Boniface Church  
by the Rev. Canon Edward M. Copland, Rector***

***Homily at the Requiem for the Rev. Russell A. Bechtel-Karlson, 11:15 a.m. Sunday,  
October 11 (Proper 23B)***

**Note:** A sermon is like other spiritual encounters, uniquely experienced by the individuals involved, and as varied as they are. The things the speaker says and the hearer receives are open to the workings of the inner spirit. That's why many spiritual encounters fall flat when we attempt to recount them the next day! Added to that my sermons are preached from notes and things change in the moment of delivery, so you'll understand why I am reluctant to hand out so-called "texts" of the sermon. Sometimes, as in this case, I make notes which produce ideas I can write for you to think about. **Ted Copland**

Often as we attend a funeral, we think of our own. Have you ever planned your own funeral? Those savvy enough to pick lessons often want the "nice one with the great poetry which says nothing will separate us from the love of God" or the "many mansions in God's house" one, and they are typical for funerals.

But only those of great integrity are willing to say "I want my funeral at the Sunday service." That means the lessons of the day will be held up as a measure of our life, as a signpost for this point of the great journey. And since none of us can know when that day will be, such a request would open us to be measured by the Gospel according to God's terms, not ours.

Russ Bechtel asked for his funeral to be at the Sunday Eucharist. His normal humility would never have allowed him to say his life could be measured by any lesson from the Gospels, but I can tell you that is true.

Look at today's Gospel: the story of the man who turned away from Jesus because he was burdened by so many possessions. He was a good man who kept the commandments and in a culture and religious climate which assumed that riches were a sign of God's blessing, it never occurred to him, or to those listening, that Jesus would ask this of him.

Now Russ's love of children and animals may have given him a Franciscan quality that carried throughout the year between his St. Nicholas appearances, but we can not say he was a man with no riches. Those of you who have been in their home know that love of music has led to way too many CDs, and Russ' love of good food was a hallmark of the life he shared with so many of us. More than that it was the integrity of his life as a follower of Jesus which fits with today's Gospel story: he did not ever turn away because of the concerns of his own life.

Some of you may not know of the great gift which Russ and Bob gave this parish and community by their life together: twenty five years of fidelity and love as a sacramental sign of grace to all who knew them. Their constant participation and Russ's leadership in the life of this parish created a holy space which made life easier for gay and lesbian couples, and enabled all who knew them to come to respect what God had done in their lives.

I remember very well the way we celebrated their legal marriage in Canada that October 12 several years ago. We didn't all go to Vancouver, but the Boniface staff had a lunch here and managed to make sure a bottle of bubbly was delivered to their table at the meal following the ceremony. Given the bishop and the climate in this diocese at the time, it was all we could do. Russ wanted then to have me list his name in the leaflet as Bechtel-Karlson, but in order to make sure I could keep his annual license from the bishop to be a priest on this staff, I was afraid to do so, until today. Do you get a little clue about who had the greatest amount of integrity in that story?

Today's epistle talks of Jesus as our great high priest but still able to sympathize with our humanity, thus making it possible for us to approach God with boldness, to receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

That is a model for all priests, and Russell was a good priest and a great friend to so many of us. He helped us approach God with boldness, he was a carrier of mercy and grace, and just as much as our hearts miss him, so our song praises him and commends him to God's care.