
The Resurrection Sparkle of Hugh Chapman

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Words from the Very Reverend Sam Candler
At the Funeral of Hugh McMaster Chapman (11 Sep 1932 - 29 Apr 2007)
First Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, Georgia
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With a twinkle in his eye, and a smile which could win over the world, Hugh Chapman tricked us.

Hugh Chapman tricked us into thinking he would live forever. He certainly tricked me. With a spirit that was ever-giving and ever-generous, he lived as if there was no end. He loved all those around him as if there were no limits to love.

He loved Anne, and Janis, and Allston and Rachel and Mary, and Scott and Austin and Hugh and Crawford and Anne Morrison. He loved each one of them, as if there were no end. He loved each of you, his true friends, as if there were no end.

When he got sick, with acute leukemia, the way he lived and loved through that illness was astounding. We all knew it was a serious illness. We knew that from the outset; but we could never tell that from talking with him. Every time I visited him, he was most certainly alive and vibrant. He tricked me, really, tricked me in that wonderful and grand Southern way; he tricked me into thinking he might live forever.

When the time did come for his body to give out, in these last two weeks, the end came suddenly and quickly, just as quick as his mind and his wit always were.

The physical body of Hugh Chapman has died now, but there is much that remains.

Like many of you here, for me what remains is the memory of Hugh's wit and his mind. Even when his body was failing, his intellect and his keen insights were not failing whatsoever. Conversation with him was a true joy.

What also remains is the memory of his gentleman spirit. He was one of the best that the South has produced. In the South, the theological way we describe "gentleman spirit" is with the word "grace." Hugh Chapman was a man of grace.

He represented both the strength and the tenderness of grace. For grace does not mean weak-hearted and dull. Grace means efficient and resourceful. It means sharp, and Hugh Chapman was definitely sharp. He had edge to him, but it was an elegant edge. He was at just as much at ease with a shotgun, or a golf club, or a kiss, or a business deal. For him, they were all instruments of authentic grace.

His grace extended, of course, in matters of generosity. That generosity also remains. He was generous to everyone he touched, from the fellow who sorts the mail to the highest corporate executive. He treated everyone fairly to a fault, and not only fairly, but with the same boundless generosity.

He often seemed puzzled, to me, when others did not share that generosity. In fact, it was that generosity that sometimes confounded others. Because, for Hugh, being generous in one place did not mean refusing to be generous in another place. It's the reason he has both a Presbyterian and an Episcopalian conducting this service today! Hugh could love many people, and many institutions, with equal and magnanimous grace. That generosity certainly remains with every one here today.

But there is one more thing, one more important thing that remains. The most important element of Hugh Chapman that remains is the sparkle in his eye.

You know what I mean. We saw it whenever he spoke of the things he loved: Linville, where he lifted up his eyes to the hills; East Lake, and Augusta National, and almost any good golf course or good land. We saw that sparkle in his eyes when he spoke of those he loved: his friends and his family. We saw that sparkle in the midst of joyful conversation.

For me, that sparkle is resurrection. That sparkle in Hugh Chapman's eyes was always a sign for me that, no matter what happens in our journey, there is always new life. His daughters told me that, just after Anne died, Hugh wanted his young daughters to remain in the sitting room while he fell asleep. He wanted to hear their conversation as he fell asleep in that sad time. Hugh Chapman's eyes were wise indeed; he knew that out of severe loss, new life can arise. Later, of course, he married Janis; and his eyes sparkled with new life again!

That sparkle in Hugh's eyes knew that no matter how ill the body was, there is also abundant life. No matter how much conflict and pain, and even suffering, the eyes of Hugh Chapman saw hope. The sparkle in Hugh Chapman's eyes meant hope and life.

Today, even though his eyelids are closed, the sparkle of his eyes remains. To us, his friends and his family, I say, "Remember that sparkle." That sparkle means resurrection and life, yes, and even joy. In a way, the resurrection is God's marvelous trick for each of us; for the resurrection claims that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, not even death itself.

Today is a day for sadness, to be sure. We miss the body and the tangible love. But the spirit, Hugh's spirit, is soaring. He has waited for the Lord and renewed his strength; he has mounted up with wings like eagles. The Lord's eye is on the sparrow. And the eyes of Hugh Chapman are sparkling, sparkling in God's heaven, and sparkling in our souls, this day and forevermore.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip