
For John Miner

At the funeral for John Miner

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. And what came into being in him was light... There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. ...He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.” The Gospel of John, chapter 1

John Miner told his family very clearly that he wanted no eulogy at his funeral—no family member or friend talking about his life—though he had plenty of family members and friends who could do. Then he said, “If Sam wants to say a few words, that will be okay.”

He meant me, of course, but not exclusively. He would have said that sort of thing, no matter who the dean was at the Cathedral of St. Philip. That’s the kind of faithful man, and proper leader, and devoted saint, John Miner was.

We gather today to remember a man who taught all of us, friend and family, clergy and layperson alike, what it means to love the Lord God with all your heart, your mind, and your soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself—and to do so with integrity and single-mindedness, and sincerity and honest devotion.

As a young boy in Daytona Beach, Florida, John used to ride his bicycle to the local church in order to serve as acolyte. He used to tell me stories of the race cars that used to race down there, on the actual beach.

He did well in school and made his way to the Georgia Institute of Technology, and enlisted in the United States Navy. He came to love Atlanta, but when he married the lovely Cecil, he would forever remind everyone that she was the love of his life. On one of my visits to John and Cecil last fall, he reminded me how long they had been married. I had been giving thanks that day that I had recently celebrated my own 34th wedding anniversary. Wow: 34 years. But John was telling me that he and Cecil had been married 68 years—exactly twice as long.

John’s faith and devotion touched pretty much every thing that has ever happened here at the Cathedral in the last sixty years. I am serious—his holy hands touched pretty much everything. He served as junior warden, and senior warden, and chapter member several times. He was head verger, he taught, he led. He was at the glorious Prayer and Praise services, way back in the day. He was touched by piety and devotion, and he touched this church with piety and devotion.

A few years ago, even as his body begin to weaken, he helped me start the Dean’s Men’s Bible Study; and he would be here at church every Tuesday morning at 7 am. Of course, for many years before that, he was gathering with several of his old buddies simply to pray—every Wednesday morning for decades. (Paul Lutz told me a few minutes ago that they have been gathering in that manner just two months short of thirty years.) In particular, he would tell me, they would pray for the staff, the church staff. I note that John Miner was not afraid to share his faith with men: The Cathedral Men’s Group, his Band of Brothers, the Dean’s Men’s Bible Study. Of course, he loved women too—and especially his outstanding and equally faithful daughters: Linda and Lois and Peggy!

He was the kind of man who could love shooting turkeys on Cumberland Island, who could love the wildness of that place actually, and then a week later, be leading a grand and solemn and orderly liturgical procession here in the Cathedral of St. Philip.

He taught men the kind of gentle faith that has sustaining power. He taught men and women what the power of sustaining faith is. He was a trusted advisor to several deans in this place—David Collins and John Sanders (I see David Collins here today), and many more canons and priests. And a few bishops, too. Because he was a friend of Jesus, he was a friend of all.

Along the way, John learned to be a man of prayer. That prayer taught him to truly care for his people. He became one of the great pastors of this Cathedral. He is a saint today. We remember him as a saint—not so much for what he said, or claimed, or taught, though he did those things well—but he is a saint simply because of who he was. He truly lived out the attributes of Philippians 4:8. In that verse, Saint Paul says, “Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” John Miner not only thought about those attributes; he spoke them.

And he focused on them, the qualities of peace and joy, in an incredibly single-minded way—even during the conflicts of church life—and John sure saw his share of church conflicts. He watched good friends leave the church he loved, for instance. Even during those conflicts, John never said the disparaging or negative word. John said the words of loyalty and honor, and he lived them.

Of course, he loved Georgia Tech. Amidst all the red sweaters and red blazers that often appeared here at the Cathedral on Sunday mornings, John proudly wore the gold and white of Georgia Tech.

Finally, I want to salute, personally, John’s family: Cecil and his three daughters, nine grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren. John told me those numbers every time I saw him. Your own loyalty and trustworthiness, your own love and faith, are really the great tributes to his life. You are the evidence of his sainthood.

Last Saturday, the day after John fell, I visited him in the hospital. It was evident that his body was growing feebler, but that his mind—and his spirit—were as sharp and faithful as ever. We prayed. Later that evening, Canon Wallace Marsh visited, and John wanted to pray the service of compline. Wallace says that when they prayed, it was obvious that John remembered all the correct responses.

And then, around midnight, his granddaughter, Jennifer arrived, too. I may get this story wrong, but it goes something like this. Jennifer asked if he wanted to pray, and he said, “Yes.” And he asked if she would read the very words that we read as the Gospel a few minutes ago: the first verses of the Gospel of John. As they prayed, John actually held out his hands, cupped, as if he was ready to receive communion—as if he was ready to receive communion. Then, when the words were over, John said, simply, “Alleluia. Praise the Lord.” He died about six hours later; his last words were “Alleluia.”

This Cathedral will remember those hands of John Miner, always open and ready for communion, lifted up in praise while we were singing “I am the Bread of Life,” and touching, always touching his family and the people of God with love. Those hands were the witness to resurrection and life. John Miner was the light, the word made flesh, full of grace and truth.

“Amen! Alleluia!”

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