
The Forecaster of Color: A Tribute to Allen Jack Ferrell

**A homily at the funeral of Allen Jack Ferrell
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart find favor in your sight, oh Lord, my strength and my Redeemer. Amen.

As you settle in, I invite you to look around at the stained glass windows in this space, space that Allen loved, windows that he adored. As you think about the light coming through the windows or the stories that each of the windows tell, I also invite you to turn around and look at the Rose Window in the back, and its beauty and its structure

In Christian tradition, stained glass windows have stood as an image of the incarnation of God's expression and creation through all created beings. You can get a sense of that as you look at these beautiful windows. The light, the white light coming into them, being refracted into all of these beautiful colors, and at the right time of day, you can see those patterns on the walls and on the floors.

It's not hard to see why this resonated with ancient Christian mystics as being the presence of God refracted through humanity. And it is that image today that I offer you as a symbol of Allen and his life, because Allen was the one, if you think about it, who seemed to be closest to the white light of God and refracting it into many different colors. Yes, particularly purple, but really many different colors.

It was Allen, who I'm told, while working for Samsonite decided that all luggage shouldn't just be brown or gray or black, and was the driving force behind all of the multicolored suitcases that you now have to choose between as you come into the airport and wait beside the carousel. That, too, is a wonderful image, isn't it? A brightening of the world, an introduction of beauty and the skill to make that happen when it was new and different.

And Allen's skill wasn't just in creating beauty, though he was wonderfully creative and had a particular talent for colors, it was also in bringing people together. Some of you worked with Allen on the Antiques Show. You may remember those notebooks that seemed to get bigger and bigger every year. I didn't know they had spines that thick, but there was Allen with everything organized, everybody's role described.

And whenever there was conflict, it was Allen who seemed to bring people in, calm us down, and focus us on a larger purpose, which was the beauty of this show, and the beauty of working on it together.

His ability to reach across the aisle is really unparalleled, and the greatest example that I can think of is this story of Allen when he was still working, not in Atlanta, and he was in a particularly difficult deal. It was information technology and platforms, and you know how that mixes all kinds of different people. And the arguments began to get bigger and the sides began to get more polemic and polarized.

And it was Allen who spotted real beauty there amongst all of this chaos. It was on the other side. Her name was Gayle. In the midst of this deal falling apart, Allen found his life partner. That's skill. Recognition of beauty. And it's what I remember about Allen, and I suspect you do as well. Wherever he went, it was as if beauty followed him and wherever it followed him, it is as if community emerged from that.

We read in John's Gospel about the many dwelling places, and we have often thought of that reference as the expansiveness of Heaven, so that no matter who we are, we will be ultimately at home there, and I think that's true, but actually, I think that image is ancient and it refers not to the expansiveness of Heaven, but to way stations along a camel trail, places where you would stop and rest and find refreshment and community before moving on.

You can see Allen's life as a progression of resting places where he stopped and was refreshed, and community emerged, and we have followed him down that trail, knowing and trusting that we were moving ahead, because somehow it seemed that Allen was following the light.

Just as he functions as a stained glass window, perhaps he also seemed to be close to the white light that contains all the colors, and knowing that, we followed him into bigger and bigger life; knowing that, we followed him into Heaven, which is, of course, an existential state of mind, a place where we live in eternal life. And it is that journey that we have Allen to thank for, those resting places that he seemed to have known were there, and led us into and settled us in, and led us from, time after time after time.

And now we have Allen's example to live on. The love he felt for us, we can feel in our hearts, and we will be able to pick the next resting place as if he were still there guiding us forward, because he taught us how to live, how to be a follower of the light, refracting that into the beautiful colors which are uniquely expressive of each of us. We have Allen to thank for that.

So as we leave this place today and go into the Court of Gratitude, I invite you to tell stories about Allen, moments when you found your place in that refracted light, moments when you found your resting place because he had led you there. Some will be funny, some will be sad, but he will be bigger in our hearts and imaginations as we tell these stories, and we will emerge from this place at this time as a community, as somehow knit together in our love for Allen and his love for us, and nothing would've made him happier. Amen.