

Lawrence “Burr” McVickers Dec. 29, 32-Oct 14, 10

Rev. Dick Piscatelli, Williamsville UMC

Life is precious. God has provided us with so many days on this earth to do the job he has sent us to do. Some live long lives, others shorter ones. The one thing we know as Christians is that God put us here in order for us to find our way back to him through our faith in his Son Jesus the Christ. That is why he came so that we would learn that death is not the end, but a new beginning in a place where we will find peace and happiness and joy forever. As we celebrate Easter every Sunday, when we come to a time like this today, we celebrate a different kind of Easter, for today Burr has his resurrection and he now rests from his labors and has found the joy of living in heaven with family and friends.

One of my favorite hymns of the faith begins, “When peace, like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul. Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come, let this blest assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed his own blood for my soul...and Lord haste the day when my faith shall be sight,, the clouds be rolled back as a scroll, the trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul.”

Some of you might know the story of this hymn, for others let me tell the story briefly. Early in the 1900's Mr. Spafford was going to take his family on a trip across the ocean. At the last minute his business would not allow that to happen. Instead of cancelling the trip he sent his wife and two daughters on their way telling them he would join them as soon as he could, perhaps in a few days, or in a week or two. He kissed his wife goodbye as well as his two daughters and he watched the ship sail off into the sunset. Little did he know his life would be turned upside down within a few days, for one day out at sea the ship sank. Those who lost loved ones and friends waited word of survivors. It came but it wasn't what he wanted to hear. His wife sent a telegram with just these words, "Saved alone" which meant his two daughters were lost at sea. He took the next ship going to Europe which took the same route. He asked the captain to let him know when they got to the spot the where the other ship sank. Sure enough the ship came to that spot and they stopped the engines and Mr. Spafford looked over the rail at the place where the ship went down taking his two daughters with it. Perhaps he prayed for them and their new home in heaven knowing with the hope of his faith that one day he would see them again. After grieving their loss, Mr. Spafford returned to his cabin with calmness and internal peace as words came floating to his mind that though he was hurting with the loss of his daughters, knowing how much their mother hurt, he still could look to God for strength and courage. All of sudden those words became more vivid as he began to write, "When peace like a river" and he continued to write during this loss the hymn, "It is Well

With My Soul” that has brought so much peace to many a heart who has struggled with a loss of a loved one. For you see, it is at times like this that we can thank our God for opening the doors to a new home where we will live forever with peace in our hearts and the joy of waiting for others to follow.

I say all this to say today no one in the McVickers family or in this town ever expected we would be here today celebrating the new life that Lawrence “Burr” McVickers now enjoys. Who knew he would be rushed to the hospital to face surgery that was unexpected. Who knew that for 6 hours he and his family would sit waiting for the doctor to come to perform this surgery? Who knew the bad news that would come? He had a 20% chance to make it. Could he beat the odds? Everyone was praying, everyone was optimistic, and when the time came to kiss him goodbye and go wait the results, they all went with peace in their hearts trusting in the Great Physician to do his thing that he does so well. And they waited and prayed. He came through the surgery, but well, let’s just say, it was just too much. He tried his best. He gave it a shot. But it was not to be. Yet, in those 6 hours before they had together there were times he cared more for Margie and Carey then for his own situation. You see, though Satan had thrown a monkey wrench into their lives Burr and Margie were optimistic he would be okay. Burr had a quiet peace knowing that though things weren’t in his favor, the one thing he was banking on, and that was that “it was well with his soul.”

And today those of you who are here are helping in the celebration of a life that touched a town, a church, and other communities because a man named Burr, named because as a child he raised rabbits, gave of himself for others. It didn't matter who the person was, Burr helped when called upon. He loved this town. He loved its people. And since he started to attend church, he loved his church. He never liked to miss. Maybe it was the sermon, or the singing, or just shaking hands with the people he may not have seen for a week. Something drew him to church like a magnet and he enjoyed each Sunday, each worship time because it brought him inner peace and strength. He greeted people with a handshake and a smile. When they had coffee fellowship he made many a trip up and down the stairs. When he was asked to serve on a committee he said okay, though he missed the one and only meeting we had. What an honor this town has paid him by lowering the flag to half mast for a man who fought for his country in the Korean War, and worked to make this community a better place. Now that Burr is gone a story can be told that tells you the character of this man. While serving in the Korean War he became the driver for a general. He did it with integrity and with the heart of a man from a small community of Williamsville. But here is where we learn more about Burr McVickers. Though anyone else might have felt this was a cushy job, taking a general to a parade, being his driver, keeping him out of harm's way. For Burr, he felt it was not what he came to do. He came to fight the enemy, not drive a general. And one day he blurted that out to some of his friends, and low and behold who just 'popped' in for a visit but an old friend and classmate from

Williamsville that had driven miles and hours in a jeep to surprise him. As Burr complained about his driving the general out from being hidden pops his friend to surprise him. When I heard the story all I could think about was a Gomer Pyle moment when Gomer would be someplace with his sergeant and he would always say, “Surprise, surprise, surprise.”

Many of you know his humble, quiet ways. But if you needed him, he was always there. Even this past week he delivered meals-on-wheels to those he delivered to over and over again. I think it wasn't just the meals they received that they will remember Burr for, but also his wonderful smile, his warmth, his caring spirit. He would not just drop off the meal, but he would take time to see how they were, listen to them speak, and tell them he would see them the next time. I bet they all looked forward to his coming and they will miss his sweet, sweet spirit.

Today it is a sad day for Margie, Carey, Melvin, the grandkids and you his friends. But maybe in just a small way it is well with your soul knowing that Burr is at peace these days watching down from above letting you know he will always be with you in your hearts. Burr might just be up there trying to tell us all not to worry about him anymore for it is well with his soul. You see, he is with Jesus now. He is with family now. He is with John O'Neil, Paul Lugibil, Norm Doty, R.C. Smith and Bill Gaithers and others, just to mention a few,

who have crossed over the bridge of troubled waters. Add to that a reunion with his family, seeing Jesus, knowing the peace he now has, receiving his crown, and we can stop for a moment and say in our hearts, “boy, it doesn’t get any better than this.”

God is truly good, my friends, for as we know death is not the end. Oh, yes it’s the end of life on this earth as we know it, but our loving God sent his Son to prepare us to be able to spend eternity with him. Through our faith, through believing in Jesus we can have peace in our hearts knowing he died and rose again in order for us to enter into eternal life with him where there will be no more tears, nor sorrow, nor operations, nor hurts of any kind. That’s why we today who have this faith can say no matter what enters our lives; we too can have ‘peace like a river’ knowing because of Jesus, it is well with our souls.

Talking with the family they shared those memories of making milkshakes, driving lessons, words to be careful as you drive. In fact on our last Sunday as we were leaving for our vacation trip the last thing Burr said to me was be careful driving. Watch out for the other guy. And Carole and I were very fortunate to return on Thursday and visit and pray with and for Burr in the hospital while he waited for his limo to heaven. He was at peace, maybe because of the medicine, and maybe because he had made his peace with the world and with his Savior. I don’t know which, but I know this, his heart was strong right to the end.

The grandkids will remember him taking them to doctors, dentists, watching them play sports and lots more. He loved them, and they loved him. And when his brother Melvin and his wife Reta recently returned to Williamsville he looked forward to caring for his older brother. He looked forward to having him around again like when they were kids. Melvin shared one time when they were real young and their dad ran a gas station and in those days you took the money home with you. Well that night while they were sleeping Melvin saw someone at the window trying to get in. He being the older wasn't so brave because he kept trying to wake his younger brother up, but Burr just wouldn't wake up. Being scared to death Melvin kept poking and telling him to wake up because someone was trying to break in and rob them. Not wanting to disturb their father, he just poked and poked Burr to have him fend off the robber, but he kept sleeping. Finally, the would be robber, just left...and Melvin was glad. And he never told his dad about the guy who tried to rob them. And Burr slept through it all.

Of course for Margie, well the love of her life is not by her side these days. On Friday they would have celebrated 55 years of married bliss, and every day was as good, as or even better than the day before. They have been through so much. Even this past year with the tornado taking their house, living in the parsonage for awhile, and now in a new home, it was all okay, and she had her peace because the love of her life made sure they were okay. And what a blessing it was the night of his surgery because for 6 hours they had time to

prepare for the future, and just be together. Though he is gone now, he will always be with her. She will remember the clock her mom gave her that was ruined in the tornado but Burr had it restored and it sits there keeping perfect time. Burr made sure Margie had all the care she needed and made sure she got to doctors when needed and tried his best to make her well. For him, as has been said, he hadn't seen a doctor for over 32 years. Let that be a warning for some of you who haven't seen a doctor lately. His remedy for everything was to take a speedy Alka Seltzer. Just pop one or two of those things in a glass of water for what ails you and in a fuzzy few minutes down the hatch and instant cure. Sorry, but no Alka Seltzer this time could do the trick, my friend.

For his son Carey his dad taught him many things. The most was to do the best you can. Work hard. Play hard. Give it your all. Listen to the coaches. Don't complain, but pay attention. It worked when Carey was in school and while he has been coaching. In fact, Burr never took time off from work, and he never was late. That was something else he taught Carey. Accept everyone for who they are, welcome them as family and friends. And one time when he was in high school playing ball his dad told him never to waste the coach's time. Listen intently and then do it. And recently Margie said one time Burr asked if he could get her a glass of milk and she said sure. So Burr goes into the kitchen, gets out the milk, pours a glass, puts the milk away, and sits down next to Margie. Margie said, "Burr, where's my milk?" "OOPs" he blurts out, and goes back into the kitchen to get it.

We all are going to miss him. But we will not forget his generosity or his smiling face, or his helping hand. We thank God for creating such a man as Lawrence “Burr” McVickers, a man with a great big caring heart, who loved his family, loved his town, loved his friends, loved his church, and loved his Lord. We thank God that one day down the road he will be there to greet us as we cross from this life to eternal life. There will be celebration after celebration as family and friends get together again with no more separation.

Until that time maybe we need to be reminded once again of one of my favorite hymns, that no matter what comes your way, no matter what we face, we can face it with the assurance that our God is still there, and with that, we can say like Mr. Spafford, “When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll; whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul.”

May it be well with all our souls today? Burr is at peace. He has fought the good fight. He has received his crown. He has heard those familiar words from God himself, “Well done, my good and favorite servant. Much was asked of you, much you have accomplished.”

So today we celebrate his coronation, not as a king, but as an heir to the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Now may we find that peace that comes knowing it can be well with our souls, for God has given us his promise to always be with us and he has given us the precious gift of eternal life?

Now to us who remain behind let there be peace in our hearts knowing one day when we all get to heaven there will be great shouts of joy that will fill heaven for in this grand reunion we will feast around the table of grace thanking our God for his grace and mercy. Waiting at the gate will be our loved ones. There will be singing and dancing and shouting, so much joy that we will hug and kiss forever and forever.

So today let us hang on to this blessed hope. And one last word from Burr....to all of us....be careful not to walk in front of garbage trucks....be careful when you are driving...and I'll keep the light on and the milk and ice cream cold for those milk shakes for when we get together someday.

Thanks Burr, for the example you have given to us in the town of Williamsville, and the churches and the community where you have ministered. May the blessings of God always be with you. Thanks for the memories.....