

Prelude

Welcome and Opening Prayer Rev. Delilah Phillips

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 3:1 Rev. Sid Venable

"There is an appointed time for everything, and a time for every affair under the heavens

Hymn "Bless Be the Tie that Binds" (Sing in Unison) Mary Nina Davis

Sharing Memories and Stories: Al Wilson, followed by others who wish to share

Eulogy Rev. Delilah Phillips

Special Music: "Simple Gifts" Angela Anderson

Commendation and Benediction Rev Delilah Phillips

Postlude

Welcome and prayer:

Welcome and thank you for being here to honor the life of Mike Smathers, beloved husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, pastor, confidant and friend to those represented here today and innumerable others. At his 2016 inauguration into the Cumberland County High School hall of fame, the Crossville Chronicle reported that Mike Smathers has touched countless lives by utilizing his plethora of God-given talents and has most assuredly fulfilled his high school ambition to "Be a benefit to the world." Today you will hear stories about Mike's life that will warm your heart, make you laugh and perhaps even make you cry. It doesn't feel right to be in this group of people without his towering presence. It doesn't seem right to open up the microphone and Mike not take it and talk. And talk. And talk. His presence is sorely missed amongst us.

Romans 8:35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will affliction or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword? <sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than victorious through him who loved us. <sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Will you bow your heads and pray with me?

Almighty God, our creator and redeemer, you are our strength and our hope. You have given us Mike to know and to love in our pilgrimage on earth. Uphold us now as we entrust him to your boundless love and eternal care. Assure us that not even death can separate us from your infinite mercy. Comfort us in our anguish, that we may know your sure consolation and live in confident hope of the resurrection; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Eulogy:

It has been about 7 years since I first talked to Mike about his funeral. Pastors are weird, it's true. We had experienced a few really hard funerals in our church family that Mike presided over beautifully. Mike was the ultimate funeral pastor- he's even published a book of eulogies celebrating the lives of members of the community, entitled "Let them not be forgotten" in which he poured his talent and his heart into weaving the beauty of the lives they lived into the glorious story of God. It was a gift and a craft, one of his many incredible skills. I knew the time would come in which we were left to do the same for him and I asked him, "Mike, will you write your own? If you write it, I'll deliver it." He gave me the laugh- you know the one- and he told me he would think about it.

Unfortunately for us, he never got around to the task. In some ways I think maybe the ask was too much, to write down what you might want people to remember about you is a lot to consider when you think about how humble he was. He did leave me with some instructions though- not to talk long and definitely don't get too preachy. Ironic, I say.

I could fill half an hour with Mike's accomplishments and still leave off one or five ways in which he made the world a better place. I could begin by listing the big offices that he held- that of Pastor to two different congregations, CFO, Founder and Director of Creative Compassion, even further back- Member and Chairman of the Board of Education here in Cumberland County.

BUT WHO HE was, was not what he did nor what he accomplished.

Who he was, was a storyteller, a fixer and a dreamer.

I keep drawing this map in my heart of the wide angle lens moments in which Mike journeyed the path that God would have him walk. From being a child of a Pastor and answering the call to ordained ministry himself. After moving back to this community to become a pastor at the very church he grew up in, he felt called to leave and begin a non-profit, Creative Compassion. While the church begged him not to go- he held strong in his conviction that where God called, he would find a way. In his speech at his retirement luncheon 16 years later, he admitted that he was without an income for three years in which Judy supported the dream. Countless lives were made better because he held tight to that call.

He lived his life that way, though- he searched for God's will and he followed it. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was more than story he told, it was a life he chose.

What his resume won't read, nor his obituary have room to cover, is the way in which he cared for those around him as an expression of that faith. Because God placed deep empathy and Christ-like love for neighbor in his heart, he spent his entire existence on this earth answering the call to service, love and compassion.

He never missed a chance to hear the story of a person's life

He always showed up for his family

He was stubborn as a mule and his stubborn ways paid off for those he was working for

He loved Judy with his whole heart for their whole lives

He followed Jesus.

LEAVE IT TO HIS OWN WORDS `

We are empowered to comfort the afflicted and when necessary to afflict the comfortable, to exalt the humbled and humble the exalted, to live for what is right and true and just.

Life after the resurrection is not necessarily an easy life. The invitation is not to accept certain doctrines, ideas, or beliefs but to a way of life.

And that way of life is following one who was ridiculed, arrested, condemned and crucified. The one who said, "I have no place to lay my head," and "Take up your cross and follow me!" A person carrying a cross was on their way to their execution. Those who follow the Resurrected One may yet learn why the prudent Romans fed their lions on Christian meat. Of course, there is no imperative forcing us to allow the resurrection to change and empower us. We can continue to be more concerned with protecting our privileges and possessions

than we are with seeking basic human rights for those marginalized by contemporary society. We can continue to live in ways that ensure our comfort while we ignore the pain of our neighbor. We can continue to place decorum above the lives of school children. But if we do, we are misrepresenting God for we are testifying with our lives that there was no resurrection and that the life, teachings and death of Jesus are of no consequence for us today.

The resurrection of Christ makes a difference in the world, and that difference is in us. Unless we allow the Resurrection to redirect and empower our lives right now it is meaningless to the world. If the Resurrection offers us only some distant, dreamed-of life in eternity, and is of no consequence for our lives today, we are a pitifully poor people with an empty faith and nothing new to offer to the world.

It turns out, truly, Mike did write his own Eulogy. In the life he lived. May you be encouraged today, by the witness he bore, to do the same.

All Praise, Honor, and Glory be to God and to Jesus Christ

Throughout this day and evermore. AMEN

Commendation:

Eternal God, keeper of our days, look on Mike, whom you created in your image, and claimed as your own through baptism. Comfort him with the promise of life eternal, made sure in the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

All praise be to God, Creator and Redeemer.