

Remembering The Rev. Ed Eilertsen

A Eulogy preached at the Memorial for the Rector Emeritus of St. Martin's by the Lake, by the Rector the Rev. Dave Langille.

I count myself privileged to celebrate both the life of this servant of God and the hope we have in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. I also count myself blessed to have known Ed and Judy for these past four years, most here have known them much longer. There is so much for the preacher to say, how does one choose? Let me then focus on two themes of Ed Eilertson's life and ministry: The Prophet and the Pastor.

Ed Eilertsen: The Prophet

The story is told that at his ordination Ed ended the Gospel reading with: "So endeth the Gospel", to which Bishop Keeler replied: "Edwin, the Gospel has no end." Ed's life was marked by a never ending Gospel. The son of Norwegian immigrants who grew up in a fundamentalist Church in Brooklyn, he would take the subway to hear the great mainline preacher and theologian Harry Emerson Fosdick. He would in time leave the Church of his youth and find his home in the Episcopal Church. Ed believed that God was active in the world and so he needed to be open to new developments in the human story. His Gospel was spacious, gracious, and ecumenical with a liberality to all people. As the son of immigrants and parent to a special needs child, Ed felt called to include the disenfranchised. Ed Eilertsen's life and ministry reflected a commitment to Biblical justice to the least, the last and the lost of our world.

Ed Eilertsen: The Pastor

Ed was a pastor's pastor. As Judy said of him: "People loved Ed, and Ed loved people." I've heard the numerous stories of Ed's amazing availability to his congregation. In meeting with the family this week I asked if Ed really was available 24/7. "No", they replied, "25/7!" This was a man who performed over 50 weddings per year, sometimes with two or even three on a Saturday. And numerous people had their lives changed and transformed through recovery ministries. I have heard more than a few people say that Ed would literally take them by the hand to their first Meeting. Ed Eilertsen believed in every person here today. He equipped and empowered you. And he believed strongly in the Christian faith, and led countless people to renew and rekindle their faith through his involvement with Cursillo. Ed loved his calling, as he would often say: "I can't think of a better job."

When I was called as rector of St. Martin's by the Lake, I made my pilgrimage to meet him, and found a warm, compassionate man with a keen intellect. He asked what my vision was for the Church he cared for greatly. I replied, "Ed, I want to be able to

say that everyone is welcome, without exception. There are no litmus tests. Here you will find Common prayer, a common altar and a common cup. All are truly welcome. And my role as a priest of the Church is to invite everyone, without exception, into a deeper walk with God through Jesus Christ." Ed listened closely, and then stood up holding his arms open toward me, I also stood as he embraced me and said, "I want you to know that I love you, I love you." Not only was Ed a pastor's pastor, he was also a Norwegian who could show emotion!

And Ed was a pastor to the very end. During his last week, Ed was surrounded by his beloved family in what was a holy time as his hospice room became a sacred place. I was privileged to be invited to offer Last Rites. Ed, who had been very sick, mustered the strength to ask to sit up, and though he hadn't spoken much, when it came time to pray the Lord's Prayer

Ed joined us, word for word, a prayer he had prayed privately and publicly thousands of times. The last time I was with him he was very weak, I blessed him, in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Ed raised his hand, to bless me one last time.

Ed Eilertsen: A Legacy

The Rev. Ed Eilertsen was one of a kind, a man who changed lives; his kind will not come this way again. Ed is now gone, and we have this promise from Holy Scripture, that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. For we who remain there is a singular opportunity to assess the living of our lives in light of this servant of God and the Lord he loved and served.

Looking closely at the Gospel text Ed chose for this service, Matthew 11:2-7, we know it is not one of the standard texts used in our Episcopal funeral services. "When John heard in

prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, 'Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?' Jesus answered them, 'Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me.'" When I first read it I asked, "How will this preach?" Followed by, "Thanks a lot Ed." And then I read it again, in the light of his life and ministry, and thought, "No, thanks Ed." For everyone who knew Ed Eilertson knows that he would not leave us with platitudes but with one final challenge. The Gospel reading begins in a prison. What is it that imprisons us? Materialism, Ego, Addiction, Pain? Jesus the Lord calls and invites each of us to believe in Him who brings good news to the poor, to the disenfranchised, to the oppressed and to all the imprisoned. In doing so we too will be free to encounter the living Lord that Ed Eilertsen knew, loved and served so very well and now sees face-to-face, and has heard say: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Welcome home." Amen.



"I have been called to a dream, a dream about God's kingdom, a Kingdom which is of God. I will let that dream speak to me, to my pain, to my triumph, to my life, and to my death. GOD IS FAITHFUL, and that is enough." —The Rev. Ed Eilertsen