

David N. LaBau Memorial Service ~ May 1, 2010 ~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Desiderata; Psalm 23; Colossians 3.12-17; John 14.11-12

Rarely do I have the chance to characterize somebody as a *good man*. Although, at first blush, the adjective 'good' may seem a medium step up from its cousin 'bad' and sadly less than 'best', actually saying Dave LaBau was a *good man* eclipses all available superlatives.

The goodness I mean is because of Dave's heart, the muscle of his spirit that pumped out gallons of extraordinary goodness throughout his entire life. Good simply ran through his veins. Being good. Doing good. Dave's good was that he was so decent, so honorable, a virtuous, first-rate, and gentle-man. You know what I mean?

And now, we have one less really good man among us. Missing David hurts a lot. His good spirit nourished hundreds, indeed, thousands during his 84 plus years. We are all here to remember and celebrate just how good a man David LaBau was.

Speaking today is both a liturgical honor and a personal privilege. There is way too much to say—about his devotion to Gretchen, Peter, Amy, and Brian, not to mention their partners and his dearly beloved grandchildren, Allison and Sarah; about his community service at places like the Open Hearth, the University of Hartford, the Construction Institute, and more recently Armsmear; and about his selfless devotion to this parish church for 53 years, including his serving as both Senior and Junior Wardens, on the Building and Enhancement Committees, and managing the Cemetery for a mere 40 years.

There are two facets to this jewel of a man I particularly want to touch on. No, one of them is not his computer prowess ... or rather, lack of it. In fact, he cursed the day the damnable machines emerged onto the desktop and imposed themselves on his there-to-fore placid life. '*Dave, you're done with computers. You never have to wrestle those beasts again.*' What has my attention are his humility and his mentoring.

As we all know, Dave was an architect, but he was always quick to say those were not his best skills. When I met Dave LaBau in 1986, I was working at Kent School. One spring day, he and a couple of colleagues came for a tour of the School because his firm was submitting a proposal for the expansion of the campus. In fact, Stecker, LaBau, Arnell,

McManus got the contract and now, nearly 25 years later, that campus stands as a monument to Dave's leadership at his firm, one success among so many. And my point is that he always credited others with producing the final product but, in fact, it was Dave's people-skills that was the true foundation of the work accomplished.

Dave's workshop was his retreat. In it he built dozens of things—like armoires & beds for Allison and Sarah, plant stands, Adirondack chairs, and at OSA, the Credence Table behind me, three tables, the prayer book racks in the pews, and even a box to serve as our 100 year time-capsule.

Now, the reason I bring up his building skill is both because he was very good at it, but also because it illustrates his humility. There were many things Dave did well and perhaps the best was drawing attention away from himself and towards the Other. His interest was always me ... or you. 'How is your knee?' 'What did you do on vacation?' 'That was a nice baptismal service.' A proud and good man, David was humble to a fault.

I won't go into detail about Dave as a mentor, but I dare say, more than a few of us in this room are better people because Dave stood with us and offered that gentle hand on the shoulder to guide, inspire, sometimes cajole, and support who we were and who it was we might become. It was his kind wisdom ... you know what I mean? As my senior Warden for 5 years and as my good friend for most of 14 years, I am deeply grateful for his generosity of spirit and patience with me.

For many years, Tucker, David's beloved Golden Retriever, took Dave for a walk, often in Penwood Park. This was Dave's prayer time. Much of it was spent being aware of his day and the rest opening his heart with gratitude. David was so keenly grateful for all he had, especially his lovely wife and family.

In closing, consider where Dave is now as expressed in this Hopi prayer:
"Do not stand at my grave and weep. I am not there. I do not sleep. I am a thousand winds that blow. I am the diamond glints on snow. I am the sunlight on ripened grain. I am the gentle autumn rain. When you awaken in the morning's hush, I am the swift uplifting rush of quiet white doves in circled flight. I am the soft stars that shine at night. Do not stand at my grave and cry; I am not there, I did not die." ~ Hopi Prayer

And now, Godspeed David LaBau ... to rest eternally with your Tucker after a life well lived. Blessings and Peace. Thank you for being who you were ... a truly good man.

Amen.

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