

J. Lyndon Grove
December 31, 1932 – August 21, 2020

Homily Notes from his Requiem Eucharist
Christ Church Cathedral, Vancouver BC
August 29, 2020.

Those who choose the texts to be read at their funerals have an opportunity to craft a message about what's important to them, a message that helps shape their legacy. Lyndon gave his family a gift by selecting texts, three of which we've heard, with another will come later in the liturgy. What is it that we learn about him through these selections?

First, isn't it interesting that his first text comes from science, from Lewis Thomas's great work *The Lives of a Cell*. It must come, in part, from his long relationship with Marion whose interest in health science was robust. This choice affirms that Lyndon had no truck with the facile debate pitting faith against science. For him, there was no distinction. He was in agreement with astronomer, the late Carl Sagan who wrote, "How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded, "This is better than we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant?" ... religion, old or new, that *stresses* the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by...science (can) draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by...conventional faiths."

Lewis Thomas writes, "The normal, predictable state of matter throughout the universe is randomness... We, in brilliant contrast, are completely organized structures squirming with information at every covalent bond."

The sheer fact that we exist at all invites us to contemplate the utter mystery of life itself, and Lyndon wanted us to think about that today as we grieve his death and celebrate his 88 years of an extraordinary life.

Not only did Lewis Thomas's ideas inspire Lyndon, but I'm sure he was enamoured with Thomas's capacity to express them so eloquently. When Lewis writes that we are "a completely organized structure", I can imagine Lyndon chuckling as he thought about his own personal approach to organization of paper and objects. For although he could invariably locate anything on his desk, good luck to anyone else who tried.

But such is the style of the very creative, of whom Lyndon was one: if a person's desk and workspace is an indicator of their mind, with Lyndon we saw an extraordinary capacity to hold a wide range of topics and endeavors together within his fertile imagination. Because from his agile and creative mind flowed out beautiful prose, like a good gin flows out of a well-chilled bottle kept, of course, in the freezer section: clear, thick, and surprisingly intoxicating.

Science inspired Lyndon, but so did jazz, like Charlie Parker or Bill Evans; so did show tunes by Rogers and Hart, and so did even rock, like the ground-breaking work of Becker and Fagen's Steely Dan. And so did Shakespeare inspire him. He selected the epilogue to *The*

Tempest; it gestures to Lyndon's deep faith in the mercy of God, when Prospero says, "And my ending is despair/Unless I be relieved by prayer/Which pierces so that it assaults/Mercy itself and frees all faults."

Here Lyndon affirms his trust in the mercy of God. He is telling us that we need never feel burdened by the weight of our mistakes because we are freed to be the persons that God has uniquely created us to be.

And after Shakespeare, Lyndon places before us the words from John's gospel spoken by Jesus to his disciples just before his death, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me." With this, Lyndon is speaking directly to us here today, and especially to his beloved family in their grief. Trouble not your hearts with my death, I think he's saying: my belief in God gives me the assurance of forgiveness and the joy of knowing that life continues after death into the great mystery that awaits us all.

For Lyndon, if faith didn't exactly move mountains, it did nudge him into great acts of friendship and self-giving. His care for Marion in the last years of her life showed that; his robust friendships with such a wide variety of people showed that, and supremely his fierce and gentle love for you his family showed that in spades.

Because for Lyndon, faith wasn't a matter of screwing up your intellect to believe, like Alice in Wonderland, six impossible things before breakfast. It wasn't a commodity that one has, like gas in the car—either too much or too little; no for Lyndon a better word would be faithfulness. He was faithful in his participation in the life of the church over many years. In the recent times as he lived with illness and Sunday mornings were just too difficult, he came often to this Cathedral church for the noon-hour service, arriving right on time, or just a wee bit fashionably late because of the eccentricities of the bus schedule. He was always nattily attired in a tan suit with a flamboyant flourish of colour in a pocket square, and he was reverent, in a thoughtful way, receiving communion prayerfully, and after the liturgy, commenting about the homily. More often than not when I was the presider, he would follow up our brief post service conversation with an email elaborating on the themes of the homily in the most interesting ways.

Lyndon was a friend to many clergy over the years—his friendships with David Somerville and Jim Cruickshank, now both departed, and Herb O'Driscoll, Michael Ingham and Arthur Nash stand out as cherished ones both from Lyndon's point of view and equally from those of us clergy he befriended. Lyndon could converse intelligently about matters of faith and more than hold his own in telling stories that are the lore of the Anglican communion.

A crafter of words, a lover of jazz, a family man, and a churchman: there is not enough time to tell the stories that illustrate his personality, nor are the enough adjectives to describe his unique way of being in the world. All of it came from his upbringing in the most unlikely of places, Moose Jaw Saskatchewan. When I first met Lyndon, I thought he must have been raised in New York City or Los Angeles or even Rio—but no, it was Moose Jaw.

Amongst the last pieces of his writing that he sent me is a short story unpublished as of yet, I think, called *The Late Edition*. In it, he tells of his paper route in Moose Jaw and how he was hired as a reporter at the end of high school. It's an amazing piece of writing, so very

Lyndon—he observed in Moose Jaw not a sleepy little prairie-town, but a place filled with larger than life characters whose lives he glimpsed daily as he delivered the paper. You meet a football player with big feet, Ronnie Dennis; the red-haired Irish neurologist Dr. Graham Shaughnessy who of course has a red-haired Irish setter. There's the RAF war hero Jack Spencer; the insouciantly elegant Mrs. Dawber; and Tran, the proprietor of Speedy Clean Laundry who, years later becomes the Minister of Information in Ho Chi Minh's government of Viet Nam. These and even more stories are peppered with references to Duke Ellington, Benny Goodman, Dashiell Hammett, Graham Greene and Vladimir Nabokov. It's a tour de force and it gives witness not only to Lyndon's keen observational skills but also to his capacity to remember and to place Moose Jaw in the panoply of places worthy of such vibrant characters.

That it was there that he met Marion, it was there that he honed his writing skills and it was there that lived always in his imagination is one of the world's great undocumented wonders. From there, through broadcasting studios, newspapers, magazines Lyndon never stopped telling stories rich in characters and filled with irony and wry humour.

Now he passes on the mantle of storytelling to his family and friends. And it was his request that we meet for his funeral in this place where the greatest of all stories is told, the story of the love of God known in Jesus Christ. Into that great story he is now enfolded, loved, forgiven and free. One longs to hear him tell of it because how amazed he must be to finally encounter the mystery beyond all telling.

Into that mystery with hearts full of love and minds filled with stories and song we commend him this day into the hands of the merciful and loving God who will behold him not as a stranger but a friend

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Peter Elliott". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right from the end of the name.

The Very Reverend Peter G. Elliott.