

“For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.”

One of St. Paul’s most famous lines.

He’s saying that whatever future God has for him -  
to survive imprisonment and continue to spread the gospel,  
or die in prison and be united with Christ - either way he is at peace.

Paul wants to magnify Christ through his own body,  
and is content to do it either through the work of his life  
or the witness of his death - “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.”



Paul is showing us how to make Eucharist.

We gather every Sunday to make Eucharist,  
the Greek word for Thanksgiving,  
but Eucharist is more than sharing in Christ’s body and blood.  
At its heart, Eucharist is remembering who we are,  
and then offering our true selves to Christ.

First, we remember who we are.

We tell God’s sacred story, and then both individually and as a group,  
we remember that God’s sacred story is our story,  
that it continues on from our scriptures into our lives today.

And we re-tell the story of Jesus, the Son of God.

We re-tell of his taking on human flesh,  
of his teachings, of his betrayal at our own hands,  
of his offering himself,  
a sacrifice of his life to heal the brokenness of our own lives.  
And in the re-telling of God’s story, we become the Body of Christ.



Second, we offer our true selves, our re-membered lives, our souls & bodies,  
in service to God for whatever God would ask of us.

Our self-offering in solidarity with Christ's self-offering.

And so, like Paul, we magnify Christ through the offering of our lives.



Now, that sounds pretty fancy, doesn't it?

Sounds a little heady for a bunch of folks stumbling in  
on Sunday morning with a hundred other things on our minds.

So if that doesn't sound like something real people do,  
let me tell you a story.



"For me, to live is Christ...and to die is gain."

Those are the last words of the most beautiful  
funeral homily I've ever heard.

It was preached right here by Bishop Bennet Sims in 1983  
at the funeral of our rector emeritus, Harry Tisdale.

Holy Trinity became who she is when Harry was your rector.  
Our DNA was set during that period from 1945-1963.

Like every church was after the war, Holy Trinity was bursting at the seams.  
You planted 3 new parishes.

But it isn't growth or success that people talk about  
when they tell me about Harry.

It was his humanity.



Life wasn't easy for Harry.

He arrived in 1945 a 29-year old priest who played baseball outside  
with the kids from church, and he retired on disability in his mid-40s,  
hobbled by a degenerative disease, needing a walking stick in  
each hand just to walk down the center aisle.

But with each physical loss Harry's joy in living, and joy in Christ, only grew.

Bp. Sims said what was special about Harry  
is that he helped us accept our humanity,  
because we each need help growing up into the stature of Christ.

Harry helped us with that growth, the bishop said,  
"MYSTICALLY by the transfer of his spirit to our spirit,  
and SPIRITUALLY by the cheerful acceptance of himself  
as a partial, flawed, crippled, redeemed human being."<sup>1</sup>



Eventually, we all come to know the diminishment of life,  
whether through age or loss, illness or failure.

Some days you don't even notice it. You say you've accepted it.

But resignation is not what Christianity is about.

Our faith is about "embracing the reality of life,  
AND the power of Christ to MAGNIFY life,  
in defiance of all that diminishes it."<sup>2</sup>

Harry did that, time after time after time.

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<sup>1</sup> all quotation marks from Bishop Sims' funeral homily.

<sup>2</sup> Bp. Sims funeral sermon



Harry kept us close to our own mortality.

To watch this joyous servant of Christ go from a baseball bat  
to a walking stick, to two walking sticks, to a wheelchair,  
to a hospital bed,  
is to be confronted with our own mortality.

Let me read you 4 perfect sentences by Bishop Sims.

To be in life, even in blooming health, is to face a rendezvous with death.

Harry handled that rendezvous more often than any of us will ever know,  
probably, as his hopes of recovering (or even just stabilizing)  
dimmed out, one by one, over the years.

And each time he came to life more deeply alive than ever before.

I saw him only a few hours before he died and in his eyes were all  
the brightness of the Resurrection we celebrate this day as our hope.

“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”



Folks at Holy Trinity have achieved a lot.

Individually and as a church, we're pretty successful.

It takes hard work, a lot of sacrifice, and a little luck to build things  
that endure - Marriages. Families. Businesses. Churches.

During Harry's tenure Holy Trinity had a lot of success.

But the shadow side of success is that when something goes bad,  
when marriages, families, businesses, and even our own bodies  
start to suffer or fail...or die...  
we can start to believe that we are bad,  
that we are failures, that death is winning inside us.

When your time of loss comes - and it will -  
remember what Harry showed us, that with each loss,  
each diminishment of life,  
we can become more deeply alive than ever before.

We can re-discover our true humanity  
and know that the source of it is Christ Jesus.



Tell the story of the priest who embraced life  
even from the narrowing confines of his failing body.

The one who couldn't stand up long enough to say the Mass anymore,  
so he pulled the altar out from the wall and sat behind it on a stool,  
and laughed at the absurdity of it all.

The one who edited the diocesan newspaper  
when he couldn't be a rector anymore,  
learned accounting when he had to give up the newspaper,  
then wrote a book on Genesis from his hospital bed  
using a tape recorder.

Tell about how when Harry couldn't sit up in a wheelchair anymore,  
he called an ambulance to carry his hospital bed to the Cathedral  
and got the driver to turn the sirens on as loud as they would go  
because he thought it would be fun to make an entrance.

Tell the stories so that every time we lose a job, get depressed,  
get sick, get divorced, can't pay a bill,  
we can laugh and say that our humanity is showing,  
and be reborn once again into true humanity.

Tell the stories so that with each new stage of life  
we'll know we have new gifts to offer,  
and new ways to magnify Christ.



Finally, tell the story of Harry's eyes shining with  
the light of the Resurrection just before he died.

Tell that story so that when your time comes to die,  
you might remember that you still have one last offering to make,  
an offering of your eyes filled with the same light of Resurrection  
that was in Harry, that was in Paul,  
and know that the source of the light is Christ.

“For me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

Amen.