

Funeral Service for Rowan Benjamin Evans IV

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ Rector

Scripture: John 14:1-7

***“Following the Way”***

How do I follow Gabe? I wasn't his son, and I wasn't his family member but I did get to know Rowan. We have gathered this morning to celebrate the life of a dear friend of all of us and brother in the Lord – Rowan Evans. I have had the unique privilege of knowing Rowan for a little over four years now. The first time that I really met Rowan was on a Sunday – after church when I brought Holy Communion over to the house on Gaskin Ave, to his Mom – Martha, which I did quite often. I didn't know that he visited her every Sunday after church and bringing her a Bulletin, and something about the “sports page.” He was at church every Sunday, unless there was something that kept him from her. Those of you who know Rowan knew that back a while ago – in the other church, he would leave after Holy Communion – but now he stayed until the end. What I would soon learn was that Rowan had dedicated his life to Jesus and he was trying his very best. He was the first one to tell you that we wasn't perfect – and as he would often tell me – he was really trying to work on his language. He, like many of us – was a work in progress – and we are trying to do the things we need to.

We are here today because the Lord called Rowan home, just a little over two weeks ago, on January 17<sup>th</sup>, to join Him, in Paradise. On that day, a Thursday, I was blessed to be at his house and visited with Rowan and Sherry. We had Holy Communion together, and Rowan said, as he often did, he called me “Reverend John.” I knew when my cell phone lit up and it said Rowan Evans and I pressed the button – I would hear that voice saying, “Reverend John.” That was my personal greeting, and that was really special. He leaned over and asked me will you anoint Sherry and me and ask for the Lord to give us patience for both of us --- with each other! I said “yes” and Sherry agreed. It was an absolutely wonderful visit. He wanted to walk me out to my car, putting a bag of lemons and oranges that Sherry and Rowan had packed for Marilyn and me, on my front seat – and of course Rowan had to include a bottle of wine for Marilyn, who he called the angel. Dealing with me, I guess that made her that way. He gave me a hug and said I will see you next time. I never imagined that Alissa would tell me, right after 10:30 that night that Rowan had passed and that Gabe and the ambulance were on their way. I told her that I was going too. Rowan had been taken by a massive heart attack and I anointed him, giving him the “last rites.” I, along with his family and his friends, have lost a dear friend; a loving brother, father, grandfather, uncle, who is now resting in the Lord. Rowan did not tears, he wanted a celebration! After the service y'all are invited over to the Parish Hall. We are going to have a celebration. The family has sent me about three million pictures – so I have dine my best to put them to music, and as soon as I am divested – I will head over there and ‘let it loose.’ The show is about 18 minutes long and I will let it just keep running. Many of you will see yourselves and you will see a lot that Rowan has done.

At a time like this, we can, and I have to tell you that we must look to God's Word – the Bible for comfort. I have to tell you that when Rowan took sick and was in great pain from his infected gall bladder, on that Wednesday morning, he laid on his bed and Eve was right next to

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him, but he had his Bible on his chest. Somehow he knew that if he had the Bible near him – he was going to be ok. He was telling us that the Lord was coming at five O'clock that day to take him. Uh – Rowan was late! Several weeks late – but that is ok. Time and time again, even in the ICU, when I visited him there, the Bible was right next to him – and he would read it from time to time. Time and time again he was never far from his Bible, and he knew what was in it and was learning more and more about it. He would try to trap me with questions – you know about the Lord's Prayer. He. Sherry and I were talking around Christmas at Vista Park, and he knew what he was talking about, God bless him. We always need to always remember that the Bible is rich in comfort, and its' many books and chapters contain beautiful portions that soothe and strengthen our hearts. Some of them are quite familiar to some of us. John 14:1-7 Ps. 23; 1 Corinthians 15, portions of the Prophet Isaiah and Revelation 21 to name a few. This morning, I really want to focus on several of these readings from God's Word. I believe that the Lord especially placed them in the Holy Scriptures for times just like these.

The first is found in the Book of Isaiah, written about seven hundred years before Jesus was born. One of Isaiah's shortest chapters is chapter 25, which contains only 12 verses; and this is the passage I want to lay upon your hearts and minds today. The Scripture is Isaiah 25:8 "**He will swallow up death forever.**" Beginning in verse 1 Isaiah 25 it starts with praise and thanksgiving. There's never a time when we cannot praise the Lord, and never a time when we cannot thank Him. You know I had mentioned in a sermon about a three-word prayer – it is simply "Help Me Jesus." Rowan knew that and used it – but he also followed it with another three-word prayer – "Thank you Jesus."

Today we feel sadness and loss - for our brother Rowan, who suddenly went home to be with the Lord. There is no doubt about it - we will all miss him, and indeed, our earthly lives will never be the same, but nothing has taken God by surprise. He has a plan, and He marks our days and our years. God knows what He is doing! Rowan knew that.

It is healthy and healing for us to lift our tearstained eyes to Him in praise and thanksgiving. Worshipping God helps restore our perspective; it refocuses our attention on what is invisible, eternal, durable, and may I add unchanging. There is no expiration date on the Bible – please understand that.

In the next several verses, Isaiah lists some of the reasons we should praise and thank our God. Verse 4 says that even if troubles should strike us like a rainstorm against the walls of our houses, we still have safety and strength within. Our lives are hidden with Christ in God, and in Him we find a refuge from the storm. Rowan was familiar with storms on that highest point in Coffee County – let me tell you – the wind did damage, this (the altar), and these (the reredos, communion rail) and these (the pulpit) are Georgia Long Pine. Rowan's Georgia Long Pine! Unbelievable. Isaiah, more than any of the other prophets, spoke of and pointed toward Christ. The Book of Isaiah is full of the Lord Jesus. In verse 6, Isaiah talks about the mountain in

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Jerusalem as though he had seen the cross on a hill far away; and He did see it with the eyes of faith and through the gift of prophecy. It reads...

- On this mountain, God is going to meet the needs of His people, He is going to feed them Living Bread, and He is going to spread a table before them in the presence of their enemies.
- On this particular mountain, Isaiah said, God is going to meet the needs of the people of this world.
- On this same mountain God is going to destroy something, “*the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. **He will swallow up death forever . . .***” “*On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples; the sheet that covers all nations. He will swallow up death forever.*”

Wow, what a picture: our world, spinning in space, covered in a shroud - existing in darkness. The shroud of death covers every human being who lives, who has ever lived, and who will ever live. But Isaiah predicted there is a day coming day when,

- on a particular mountain,
- the Eternal, Almighty God would jerk away that shroud,
- He would remove our sorrow,
- And then He would swallow up death forever.

Jesus Christ - on the cross, swallowed up death in victory. In 1 Corinthians 15:54-57 the Apostle Paul wrote, "*Death is swallowed up in victory.*" "*O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?*" *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*"

Today, all of us here are keenly aware of sorrow and death, but what Jesus did on Calvary when He died on the Cross and rose from the tomb changed everything for us. He prepared a feast of abundant, eternal life for us, (eternal life that Rowan is now enjoying) and He destroyed the shroud that covers this planet, swallowing up death forever. Despite our tears, our feeling of loss, we wait today on the Lord, and we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.

On the night before Jesus went to the cross, during the Seder meal – Jesus told His disciples where He was going. Jesus was going to prepare a place for them and for us – that where He is – we may also be. In His description Jesus made clear that there is a way to get to where He was going. He told them "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.*" (John 14:6) Those are words of promise and encouragement – that knowing Jesus as Lord – will bring you to the place where He is going – eternal life! Jesus continued to encourage in saying "*If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.*" (John 14:7)

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As I mentioned, I really got to know Rowan, especially during the past year as we talked on the phone quite often, and I would hear that familiar greeting, “Reverend John.” Several times a week he would stop by my office, unannounced, he would come in and we would chat about his plans and ideas for the altar. We were using a very small, borrowed altar, here with a green rug – really greenish blue from St Paul’s. Rowan had a plan. You see this altar was copied after the altar that burned in St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church in 1993. It is amazingly done. It was his plan to put that there. And then he didn’t stop. And then there is the reredos, - we had a reredos there which had been in Rowan’s barn and was put there when this church opened. It was somewhat warped but Rowan had a plan. He wanted to replace it, but he wanted it to look like the altar, amazingly enough – made of Georgia Long Pine. We would make treks in his truck, he always wanted me to drive his truck out to Willacoochie to Derek Dillingham’s wood mill and workshop to see the progress of the works of art that now reside in our sanctuary. The hen came into my office and plopped himself down and announced to me in August that my Christmas present was on its way and would be here next week. I told him I am not getting a Christmas present – and he said, ‘yes you are.’ He had this pulpit built by Derek as a surprise to me, and like the altar – this was crafted after the items that burned in the fire at the old St. Andrew’s in 1993. Rowan has the original, charred items in his home – and Derek copied them, with special alterations. I can’t tell you how blessed I am to be continuing the promise of St. Andrew’s in a pulpit of St Andrew’s that was crafted by an amazing man, Derek Dillingham, who I believe is in the Parish Hall right now. You will; see him afterwards. But there is somebody else, there is a guy named Mike. These would be bare wood if Rowan and his buddy, Mike had not sanded every single part. Steve Williams built the altar rail from Rowan’s wood, and that back wall where the cross is – but they all had to be sanded, stained and polyurethaned. Mike was there with his little headlight back over in the parish hall, and he and Rowan were sanding, then they would wipe it clean and sand again – doing everything that was needed. They sanded, stained and polyurethaned each item that was then brought into our parish hall. What a beautiful gift to the church that he loved!

I want to share with you what the plaque reads on the back of the altar. Rowan wanted it to read this way: (I wanted to have it say that it was given by Rowan – but he wanted this)

This Altar is given by The Lord  
Through Rowan B. Evans IV  
In loving memory of  
His father – Rowan B. “Bunny” Evans III,  
His mother – Martha Griffin Evans  
His Grandmother - Toolie Evans Brewer Stubbs  
And his children and grandchildren.

That is there and it will live on. There will be plaques put on the other items in days to come. He wanted to tackle another project. His next project was to be seeing that the roof of this building would be restored to its original beauty in 1939. His family has promised that we will see this done – together.

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Our dear friend, brother, father, father-in-law, grandfather – “Ro Ro” – Rowan Benjamin Evans IV has gone from this world to the place where Jesus is - to join Him at the heavenly feast – the eternal banquet – and for this we give the Lord Jesus Christ our thanks and praise. We celebrate Rowan’s life, and his passing – for the pains that troubled him for so long are now gone – and he is made whole again! Treasure his memories, treasure his love, for one day you will see him again, along with Toolie, Bunny, Martha, and other loved ones who have followed the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

In closing, I need to share with you something with you that happened after this church had been transformed – much of which was through Rowan. We stood in the sanctuary – Rowan looked around – and with tears in his eyes, he said to me, “this is home!”