

Funeral: Terry Taylor

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Job 19:21-27a

Psalms 139:1-14

Revelation 21:2-7

John 14:1-6

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I don't exactly remember  
the first time I met Terry.

I just remember there being a time years ago  
when he and Janelle started revisiting St. Anne's a lot,  
and everyone was so excited, asking,  
"Ooh, are the Taylors coming back to St. Anne's?!"  
Are the Taylors coming back to St. Anne's?!"

('Cause you know,  
the Taylors have been  
a little bit of everything:  
Episcopal,  
Baptist,  
Catholic,  
Pentecostal.)

But y'all know Terry.  
He has to think things through,  
sort it all out,  
be sure of every detail  
before he can make a decision.

Finally one Sunday  
after all this  
back-and-forth,  
in-and-out,  
will-they-won't-they intrigue,  
I saw them sitting back there,  
walked back during the Peace,  
put my hand on Terry's shoulder, and said,  
"Hey Terry, it's good to see you.  
I just need you to know  
the Lord our God has spoken to me,  
and you are right where you're supposed to be."

It seems to have worked.  
They stuck, and thank God they did  
because all the years since  
have been such a blessing.

There are a lot of us  
in this family,  
in this church,  
and in this town,  
who cannot imagine  
what our lives would have been like  
had we not known Terry Taylor.

\* \* \*

Anyone who knew Terry knows  
he was always reading something;  
in fact, Janelle and the girls say  
Terry would sometimes be reading  
up to seven books at a time. (Show off.)

When he would come to our Tuesday Bible study  
he would stay quiet and listen a lot,  
but whenever he finally spoke up  
it was always so obvious  
that he really knew his stuff  
and had read the Bible through and through.

But it wasn't just the Bible.

It was science fiction.  
It was westerns.  
It was anything with a good story,  
or anything that helped him  
connect the dots  
and understand the world better.

Of all those hundreds of books he read,  
one of his favorites was *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis.

Janelle says Terry read that book  
at least half a dozen times,  
which is no surprise  
since *Mere Christianity* is all about  
connecting the dots  
between reason and faith.

If that doesn't fit Terry Taylor to a T,  
I don't know what does.

So today I want to talk about Terry and Jesus,  
but I want to do it through the lens of three quotes  
from C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*.

\* \* \*

Let's start here:

**“A proud man is always looking down  
on things and people;  
and, of course, as long as you are looking down,  
you cannot see something that is above you.”<sup>1</sup>**

To say Terry was a “humble man”  
is an understatement,  
and we all know that.

Sure, he was proud.  
Proud of his wife.  
Proud of his daughters.  
Proud of his grandchildren.  
Proud of his front yard.

The difference is this:  
Terry may often have been proud,  
but he was not *prideful*.

This came out in Terry's life  
in a lot of ways.

You know a man is not prideful  
when he's providing for his family,  
pinching his pennies,  
and decides one day that *he* is the one  
who should repaint the family car.  
And how exactly is he going to do that?  
With a can of spray paint!

Imagine being poor Jessi Taylor—  
finally in middle school,  
finally making new friends—  
and being picked up one day  
in front of God and everybody  
by her oh-so-not-prideful dad  
driving up in his bright green  
spray-painted jalopy.

He had not an ounce of pretense . . .  
even when his daughters  
kind of wished he did.

Likewise, there was humility  
in Terry's humor and his quick wit.

Yes, Terry could be a little tightly wound,  
sometimes a little more easily frustrated  
than he wanted to be . . .  
but he also knew how to laugh  
and how to make others laugh,  
and he never stayed mad.

Like the time when he got on to Jessi—  
(by the way, please notice  
how all the crazy stories start with Jessi)—  
he got on to Jessi,  
picked her up,  
said, "You will stop this!"  
but while staring her in the eye,  
trying to be a stern Papa.

But all of a sudden  
the corner of his mouth started to twitch—  
he was the verge of the giggles,  
which is no good when you're trying to be a stern Papa—  
and Jessi just blurted out laughing in his face.

He just sloooooowly put her down  
and walked away, a conquered man.

Parental humility at its finest  
(and most comical).

But obviously, with Terry it went deeper than that.

C.S. Lewis says the proud man  
is always looking down on people,  
but Terry didn't just  
not look down on people.

Terry *saw* them.  
He saw *into* them.  
He cherished people  
and noticed them.  
He could see what was going on in their lives.  
He cared about them  
and followed up on them.

He would call his grandkids and leave messages like,  
"Just wondering how you're doing.

Get yourself tough and finish it up, okay?"  
because whatever was going on,  
he knew about it and wanted to be an encouragement.

In this church  
he offered many people a listening ear  
and was a gentle, compassionate presence.

A church member recently told me  
Terry gave him a card years ago.  
I have no idea what he wrote in it,  
but whatever it was,  
it made that church member feel seen and loved,  
and he keeps it in his Bible  
and still pulls it out and reads it  
to this very day.

Even on his deathbed,  
when Terry's health had become  
somewhat like Job's,  
he did not say,  
"Have pity on me,  
have pity on me," like Job did. <sup>2</sup>

Instead, he was worried about others,  
asking how they were doing,  
wanting to be sure they were okay.

That is not just humility.  
That is straight up Jesus  
living and acting through someone.

\* \* \*

That leads to something else C.S. Lewis wrote.  
He said:

**"Do not waste time bothering  
whether you 'love' your neighbor;  
act as if you did.  
As soon as we do this  
we find one of the great secrets.  
When you are behaving as if you loved someone,  
you will presently come to love him."** <sup>3</sup>

Terry worked for years  
in the Social Security Administration,  
where he saw a lot of things:

some good,  
some bad,  
some hopeful,  
some frustrating.

Truth is, with his brilliant mind,  
he could have worked anywhere  
and done anything,  
but he found his perch at that job  
where he could have his routines  
(and Lord knows Terry Taylor loved a routine)  
but could also look after folks  
and respond to  
the real needs  
of real people.

Terry was the kind of guy  
who would see someone who needed help  
and quietly, privately, without a word to anyone,  
make that person his next mission.

He'd help people make ends meet.  
He'd help people find a job.  
He'd help people find comfort,  
or encouragement,  
or that gentle reassurance could come only  
from the love and reassurance he found in Jesus.

Terry could be hard-headed,  
but he was also tender-hearted.

Maybe he didn't always agree with you—  
your politics,  
your ideologies,  
your life choices,  
your whatever—  
but he was going to try to love you.

When I asked Hope and Jessi  
what they learned from their dad, they said,  
“I learned to be a good person.  
Always do the right thing.  
Help others.  
Be kind.”

Those weren't just words or platitudes for Terry;  
they were a contagious way of life.

\* \* \*

But here's the thing.

We cannot talk today only about Terry,  
because in many ways,  
today is not solely about Terry.

Today is also about the One  
who brought Terry into this world,  
who knit Terry together in his mother's womb, <sup>4</sup>  
who has built the new Jerusalem <sup>5</sup>  
and has prepared a place for all of us, including Terry. <sup>6</sup>

His name is Jesus.

He is the One  
who molded Terry,  
shaped Terry,  
loved Terry,  
redeemed Terry  
and worked through Terry  
to show us glimpses of God  
here on this earth.

Every time Terry  
ever laughed with you,  
or cried with you,  
or gave you that push you needed,  
or told you a hard but honest truth,  
or reached out to you,  
or helped you,  
or forgave you,  
that was not Terry.

*That was Jesus working through Terry.*  
And how blessed we were  
that Terry was such a willing vessel.

And that leads me to my final quote  
from C.S. Lewis:

**“The Son of God became a man  
to enable men to become sons of God.” <sup>7</sup>**

Let's be honest:  
none of us wanted this day to happen.

In our earthly way of thinking,  
it came too soon,  
and life is going to feel very incomplete  
without Terry Taylor at our table.

But you know what?  
Terry knew that in our Father's house  
there are many rooms.<sup>8</sup>  
Terry knew that our Lord  
has prepared a place for him.<sup>9</sup>

Terry knew that the Son of God became a man  
so that men and women like us  
could become the sons and daughters of God.

So today,  
we miss our  
husband,  
papa,  
neighbor,  
old co-worker,  
church member,  
and friend,  
but we lean on one another,  
and more importantly,  
we lean into Jesus.

Because somewhere,  
in a place not so far away,  
Jesus has put his hand  
on Terry Taylor's shoulder,  
and he has said,  
"Hey Terry, it's good to see you.  
The Lord our God has spoken,  
and you are right where you're supposed to be."

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Macmillan, 1984. 96.

<sup>2</sup> Job 19:21

<sup>3</sup> Lewis 101.

<sup>4</sup> Psalm 139:13

<sup>5</sup> Revelation 21:2

<sup>6</sup> John 14:3

<sup>7</sup> Lewis 139.

<sup>8</sup> John 14:2

<sup>9</sup> John 14:3