

Eulogy for Roy Jones, July 9, 2019

Dear Judy, dear family and friends of Roy,

“Just in case,” - there was an envelope tugged into the safe of the Jones residence, titled “just in case.” It was opened last Tuesday. The envelope was not a love letter, that would have been a bit too romantic for a guy like Roy Jones, but it was practical. It contained detailed instructions and passwords, enabling Judy to get a hold of important documents and technical information, like how to run the remote-controlled vacuum cleaner, just in case. If you knew Roy, you knew that he enjoyed detail, precision and gadgets like most engineers do. If he was into a certain topic and got you engaged in a conversation, he would feed you more explanations than you probably bargained for. Understanding things, including the complexity of his own disease, was always something that he cherished. He was a life-long learner, always wanting to know more, finding enjoyment in new things. Just a couple of years ago, he got into the art of fly fishing, for which he learned how to craft his own bait, circling it through the air, enjoying himself.

I don't need to tell you how shocking it was to learn of his sudden death early last week. It was shocking for all of us and we felt much love and sympathy for Judy for having to digest something that she and Roy had worked hard to postpone and stave off until much later in life. Roy knew that he had a serious illness, affecting his heart, his lungs, his immune system, his life. He and his caring wife took every step they could to make sure he would be around as long as possible. All we can say today is summed up in the old saying, “it was not meant to be.” We don't know why and we don't need to speculate further, for we have too much respect for the amazing gift of life. Roy may have been young by the lofty standards of modern life expectancy, but he was seventy-five years old, and he certainly lived a full and meaningful life with many accomplishments and things to be proud of. Today we have come together to give thanks to God and to show our utmost respect to a life well lived by retelling its story.

The first thing you need to know, but you knew it already... Roy Jones was a southern boy! Born in Miami (Miama) on August 21, 1943, he was the

oldest of four children born to Malcolm and Hellen Jones. The second thing you need to know: he grew up in a military family. His father was a career Navy officer. Roy remembered going to eighteen different schools in the course of his childhood due to changing deployments. Most of them were in the American south, but at one point they ventured over the Mason-Dixon Line for a stint in Rhode Island. We can only imagine what it must have been like to start over and over again, sometimes twice in the course of a school year; just as you begin to become comfortable, just as you make friends, your parents tell you: we're leaving town again. Jesus said at one point, and we heard that passage two Sundays ago: "*Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.*" (Luke 9:58) Well, the sons and daughters of military families could say the same thing. From an early age, Roy was forced to adapt, to get used to changing circumstances, to have new places to lay his head. And while he probably didn't like it, it also taught him some important life skills, such as resilience and adaptability.

After those ever changing school years, Roy went to Auburn University in Alabama, obtaining a Bachelor Degree in Aeronautical Engineering. He was well on his way to a Master's Degree when he received an offer from AT&T to work for them in New York City. They offered decent money, even by New York standards. For the eldest son of a family that never had much, the offer was too good to refuse. His career began in the late 1960's in the Big Apple.

Over the course of the next five decades this southern boy lived in the north, but he never forgot his roots. His southern-ness shone through. It manifested itself in many different ways. He was a fierce and proud patriot; he loved hunting and fishing; he knew how to make great barbecue smoked ribs and pulled pork, a cultural requirement for every southern man; he possessed a quiet, simmering stubbornness; oh, and he could argue and argue... for the sake of winning the argument; his interpretation of life and the Bible was on the conservative side, - all of that and more had deep roots in his upbringing and made him who he was. I once asked him after we had talked for a while about his upbringing whether he had ever heard about "The Great Santini," the fictional character created by southern writer Pat

Conroy on the basis of the writer's own Air Force commander dad. He had not heard about this character, but as I described the character to him, he said, "that's my dad." I am sure it wasn't exactly his dad, but apparently there were parallels. One of the most important things that connected Roy with his dad was faith. His father Malcolm had a God moment when his small aircraft went down in the Florida Everglades and he was forced to walk through alligator infested swamps. With prayers on his heart, prayers on his lips, and with a holy fear, he made it to safety; he became more religious after that and at one point he touched his son's heart when he said, "Roy, pray with me."

Young Roy, meanwhile, carved out a path for his own life. He married his first wife Zandy; following the family tradition he got deployed and served in the Navy; and after his return home Zandy and he soon welcomed two wonderful sons into this world, Bradley and Chris. His professional path also took off. Roy found that he liked the emerging IT world much more than traditional engineering. In fact, he liked it so much that he accepted an invitation from the Univac company to work in that field and moved his young family to Minnesota. Since he found no Southern Baptist within 500 miles, he did the next best thing: he became a Lutheran. It was not reported to me whether he ever tasted the infamous Lutefisk, a traditional Lutheran dish that tests your loyalties to the Scandinavian tribes up there, but certainly, he learned that people did some interesting things 1,800 miles northwest of Miami. Why in the world do they plug in their cars at night? Well, with the first frostbitten, dead battery he learned why.

In 1986, Roy moved back south; but somehow on his way back, he got stuck in the state of Pennsylvania. It was the beginning of the Unisys Corporation. At that point Roy had been a single man again for eight years, and he probably embraced the opportunity to contribute to the newly formed company's success in another part of the country. What he didn't know... this change of scenery would also bring a new person into his life. He and Judy met, as only two driven single professionals can meet: working late in the office! The first time Judy said "Good night Roy," it was probably over a work desk as she filed out of the office. They hit it off at a company party; to her own surprise she accepted an invitation for a motor cycle ride and

the rest they say, is history. I think that Judy was the strong-willed partner that Roy truly needed for his own good. She could counter his stubbornness with rational persistence. She could go toe to toe with him. Within a year they got married and had their own home constructed. What's more impressive: within a year of being married, Roy quit his heavy smoking habits. It was a mixture of love and respect for his new wife, concern about his own health and, believe it or not, a session with a hypnotist in California. Whatever it takes! It freed him from a terrible habit!

Some of you have known Roy precisely since that time. You knew him as an active person who liked to contribute to church and community life. When I came here in 2007, Roy was our treasurer and he sometimes showed up on his beloved Harley Davidson to check the ledgers. He served on council for several terms. After he and Judy moved to Meadowood a few years ago, not much time passed and the committees at the Senior Living Community had found their man. He got involved. He liked that. They liked that.

Early in their marriage, Roy and Judy went on a 16-day motor cycle road trip through several states, visiting Graceland in Tennessee and enjoying the adventure of exploring the country on two powerful wheels. It was a special time in his life. Roy loved his dogs, several of them in the course of his life, from Bjorn to Snow and Daisy and Rosie. Roy loved playing games. He loved to win. He loved his Rod and Gun Club. This seventh generation Floridian got into Ancestry Research and found it fascinating. He loved the TV show Jeopardy and often knew the answers before the contestants. In later years he welcomed two wonderful grandchildren and loved to see them whenever he could make it to the West Coast. Fact is, there was a lot about life that Roy loved.

He and Judy found a number of good friends, particularly here at church. They had their social groups and gatherings, parties and joined vacations. But with all they had going on, Roy still had a hard time shutting down work. When he retired around 2004, he immediately turned around and started his own Consulting Company with the sexy name SDappTech. You know, only an engineer could come up with a name like that! His biggest customer? A local Harley Davidson outfit of course. He ran this consulting

tech solution company for another 12 years or so. In fact, he worked until very recently. Indeed, he had a full and rich life, and he was blessed in many ways.

We selected the reading from 2. Corinthians 5 for this service because there Paul talks very honestly about mortality. He compares our body to a tent, and as you know, tents are not the sturdiest shelters. In a tent you are close to the elements. You are vulnerable. Over the last couple of years Roy must have felt vulnerable with a heart that gave him fits, with a lung that no longer provided enough oxygen, with all the pills prescribed to save him, with frequent visits to the doctor, and with a sense that, despite it all, his stamina and physical health were in decline. His body was no more than a tent, a temporary and inadequate shelter for his soul. Paul, this man of faith who came to know Jesus only through his own dramatic God-moment, described this experience of mortality as a spiritual awakening. Mortality dawns on all of us as we get older; usually it's something we gradually adapt to; sometimes an accident or illness shocks us into the realization that our bodies are no more than a tent and will vanish at some point. But Paul describes the realization of our mortality as a spiritual moment: for him, it drew him closer to the Christ he had never met in person. It made him think about eternity and the things that last when everything else vanishes. *“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.”*

Today, as we bid this man, Roy Jones, farewell, - today, as we bring his remains to its final resting place, let us focus on that which lasts, which has no beginning and no end, the god-presence in us, the Christ in us. For we heard earlier another one of Paul's insights: nothing, nothing at all, he said, nothing in this life or the next can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. I invite you to think about that as we walk the urn to St. Peter's Cemetery. And to Roy we say: the blessings have not ceased for you; life has not ceased. It takes on another form.

Amen.