

Eulogy for Dr. Robert A. Reid

It is said that the true measure of the magnitude of a tall tree can only be known when it is felled and lies beneath our feet. If that is true, then you and I are discovering that a soaring giant has fallen in our forest. Today, those of us who have lived within the blessed shade of the impact of Robert Addison Reid and who have enjoyed the lyrical sounds of music which happily came to life within him give witness to a personal and spiritual upheaval, even as we honestly acknowledge our loss.

Robert Reid was my friend and colleague for many years. I first knew him when he came to serve on the faculty of Houston Baptist University. At a school where high academic standards were the norm, where faculty were expected to share themselves as whole persons, beyond the classroom, and where the authentic Christian commitment of academic role models was strongly encouraged, Robert's calling was easily and naturally expressed. As an administrative dean with daily relationships among students, I was pleased to have Robert serving closely with me on a significant committee which routinely called for discernment and wisdom in making critical decisions.

When, in God's providence, it was time for me to leave the university, to serve as a Pastor in a Houston-area Baptist church, I recall seeing Robert, one day, in the hallway. With that gleam in his eye and his ever-ready grin, he called me aside, looked into my face and, borrowing some syntax from the King James Version of Scripture, said: ***"Remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom."*** Both of us knew that Robert was signaling that he would like to serve with me on a church staff at some point in the future. We both laughed at his turn of phrase and happily acknowledged that such a prospect was, indeed, an attractive one.

Several years later, when the Minister of Music resigned at the Memorial Drive Baptist Church, I sought Robert out. I can still recall the joy I felt when I brought Robert's name and resume to the Personnel Committee of our church, along with my highest recommendation.

From before we began to work together in the church, it was clear that we shared a passion for the priority of corporate worship. Robert understood and firmly agreed with me that acknowledging God in our midst, praising Him and seeking His face in worship were the church family's first and highest concerns. Further, we covenanted together that we would devote significant energy, creativity and time to the planning and preparing of the worship experiences, each week.

I have worked with and planned worship with many ministers of music over the years. It is rare, indeed, when one finds the equal and authentic combination of both "minister" and "musician" in the same person. It is also rare when one discovers a gifted and creative worship planning partner who brings energy and innovation to the process of worship creation and implementation. Today, I can

tell you honestly that Robert Reid, without question, was the best partner that I have ever had in this lofty aspect of my calling.

Robert's role with me was far more than simply selecting a few hymns to "warm up" the congregation for the Pastor's sermon. On the contrary, he keenly understood that the entire worship experience was our joint responsibility and that, although our roles were different, as partners in planning, each of us was free to suggest elements and ideas.

It was in this regard that I especially witnessed Robert's many gifts and his penchant for spiritual curiosity and profound creativity. In those sometimes long and challenging worship planning sessions, where giant Post-it type posters lined the walls of my office, we sought the presence and leadership of the Holy Spirit, desiring to lead our congregation to offer its highest praise to God. We prayed together; we laughed together; we disagreed and agreed; we tried out possible scenarios; Robert often sang or whistled, to help me to catch the impact of a particular musical option; and, we struggled together until we had reached that acceptable and challenging worship plan that we could offer to the congregation. With courage and originality, Robert helped me to lead the congregation, adventurously, to new heights of devotion in their responsibility to honor God.

Robert was a man of impeccably high standards for both himself and his music. He would settle for nothing but the highest offering of music, when given to God or as an expression of his stewardship to God. He was, of course, especially talented as a composer. So often, his original works served to express his God-given abilities and to advance the cause of Christ. My ministerial colleagues in Houston would marvel when I told them of Robert's routine contributions to the worship life of our congregation.

Time will not allow me a full exploration of Robert's many positive characteristics. He read broadly and was capable of and interested in a wide range of profound intellectual topics. He loved the turn of an English phrase. He valued our common Baptist Heritage. He loved to pursue ideas and willingly explored many avenues of thought. He was eternally cheerful. Music, like sap in a tree, flowed through him. He whistled, he sang, he laughed and he caused others to do the same. So positive was his ethos, so optimistic was his outlook, so generous was his capacity to give to others.

The last time I saw Robert was last December. Janice and I had been invited, through the influence of Robert and Carolyn, to speak at the Central Baptist Church of Carthage. They wanted the church to hear about the challenging work to which God has called us in serving among Albanian immigrants in Athens, Greece. We spoke for a lunch meeting, for an evening meeting and enjoyed a quick meal with the pastor at a local restaurant. In between, Robert and Carolyn hosted us in their home. Absent-mindedly, I left my computer laptop at the Reid's house.

On Thursday morning, just before leaving Henderson, Texas, I realized that I had left the laptop in Carthage. Over the telephone, Robert insisted that he drive to Henderson and bring the laptop. I would not allow it, since, the day earlier, he had driven to Henderson, picked us up and, late at night, returned us to Henderson. So, I drove back to Carthage to pick up the computer.

When I reached the Reid's home, I knocked on the door at the garage. From the den, Robert shouted to me to "Come on in!" With that hospitality and familiarity characteristic of good friends, I made my way back to the den, where I found Robert sitting in his recliner. Immediately, I could see the weariness on his face. I realized that the previous day of hosting us had taken a toll on his tired body. Since Janice and I had to be in Austin later that day, I quickly retrieved the laptop, said my farewell and was engulfed in one of Robert's "bear hugs."

As Robert sat down again and allowed the weight of his body to find its familiar place in that recliner, I remembered another recliner in Houston, where Robert reported that, in the middle of many a sleepless night, he often had tried to rest. It is my last image of Robert on this side of glory. Today, as I remember this good man and grieve his loss, I am, nevertheless comforted by the realization that, at last, he has found a heavenly resting place and that his journey in this life is over. Rest well, my friend Robert Reid!

Dr. Robert M. Newell
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