Message by Dr. Granville T. Walker at the Funeral Service for  
Bert Bruce, December 15, 1969

In an hour such as this our souls are stirred to their depths because we gather  
in this place of beauty to pay tribute to and thank God for the life of one who in  
so many ways exemplified what Jesus meant when he said, "The good man out  
of the good treasure of his life brings forth that which is good."

It would surely be difficult to estimate what the life of Bert Bruce has meant  
not only to his family, but to our church where he has been a faithful servant,  
and to our community in his varied interest in Civic Music, the Van Cliburn  
competition and other musical concerns of Fort Worth.  

He was proud -- and rightly so -- of his family, and in their accomplishments  
he took great satisfaction. He was fun to play with as his golfing companions  
here would testify; his well-timed sense of humor was a source of delight to  
his companions.

He served in this church as faithfully as any man I know, Sunday after Sunday  
virtually without fail as one holding important responsibility for the orderly  
manner in which our worship on Sunday is conducted.

There is a passage of Scripture which readily comes to mind when I think of  
Bert in this particular connection: "I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house  
of my Lord than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

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When death came, it came quickly, and as we would reckon it, it came all too  
soon for so fine a person. But the way he went is indeed not a bad way to leave  
this pleasant land -- to live your life, whether long or short, having made the  
contribution which God sent you here to make -- and then to be gently gathered  
into the invisible fellowship as the Master of all Good Workmen calls: "Well done  
though good and faithful servant, enter into the joys of thy Lord."

Who would not prefer to go in this manner if he had the choice?

So be my passing,  
My task accomplished and the long day done,  
My wages taken and in my heart some late lark singing,  
Let me be gathered to the quiet west  
The sundown splendid and serene.
It is not difficult when you ponder Bert Bruce's life to affirm that everything the human heart has ever dreamed about immortality must be true.

For our sense of justice simply demands that the good, the beautiful and the true must be forever conserved, that it is the business of God to hold onto the highest and let the lowest go.

Great art must live forever in a universe where God makes sense at all -- but so must the artist, for the creator is greater than the thing he creates.

It was on Good Friday in the year 1520 that Raphael Sanzio, one of the greatest artists of all time, died. The last painting to come from his inspired brush, "The Transfiguration" was hung in his studio as he lay in state. When the funeral procession wound its way to the Pantheon in Rome, this painting accompanied it. Raphael had not completed it. He had not finished the figures in the lower half of the painting when death "reached over his shoulder and took away the brush."

Raphael was a relatively young man when he died, yet as someone has phrased it, "He crowded those years with creations of beauty that will never cease to arouse the admiration of mankind. Visitors to the Vatican Art Gallery marvel that the colors of the "Transfiguration" are as luminous today as they were four hundred years ago.

Pondering such a fact a thoughtful person ultimately must face in one way or another: "What of the painter himself? Is there nothing left of him save a heap of moldering dust? Is the personality of Raphael less enduring than the oils and pigments he employed? Within the soul of the Painter were dreams of beauty livelier than any of those he had put on canvas. He was endowed with a genius that required eternity for its perfection."

This is why, you see, the Christian belief in life eternal makes sense -- and is the only thing that does when we look into the abyss of death. It means that

When earth's last picture is painted, and the tubes are twisted and dried
When the oldest colors have faded and the youngest critic has died,
We shall rest, and faith we shall need it -- lie down for an aeon or two
Til the Master of All Good Workmen shall set us to work anew.
And those that were good will be happy; they shall sit in a golden chair,
They shall splash at a ten-league canvas with brushes of comet's hair;
They shall find real saints to draw from: Magdalene, Peter and Paul.
They shall work for an age at a sitting and never be tired at all!

And only the Master shall praise us, and only
The Master shall blame;
And no one shall work for money, and no one shall work for fame;
But each for the joy of the working, and each in his separate star,
Shall draw the Thing as he sees it for the God of Things as They Are.

If this be not true, if the great unused resources of human personality actually go to their death when the body dies -- then of all wasters God is the very worst. And God would then be the God of unfinished business -- producing spirits and throwing them away half finished; creating capacities he never uses nor intends to use, possibilities he never fulfills; launching ships he does not sail, and blowing bubbles to watch them burst.

Such a God would indeed be the God of unfinished business and who can believe it? No the Christian faith rebels against it crying out, "Eye hath not seen or ear heard neither have entered into the heart of man the things that God has prepared for those who love him."

We look back in gratitude upon the life of Bert Bruce thanking God for what can never be taken from us even by death -- the memories of our minds and the affections of our hearts and assured that no man who gives his life as completely as Bert Bruce has done to the good, the beautiful, and the true, no man who dedicates himself so completely to the spirit and will of Christ is ultimately snuffed out like a cheap candle.

On the contrary it is our confident Christian hope that on some glad morning we shall break bread anew with him in the Father's Kingdom -- for we know that if the earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved we have a building of God an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens.

Let us pray.
Eternal God from whom we come, unto whom we return, and in whom, while we tarry here, we live and move and have our being; we praise thee for the good gift of life; for its wonder and mystery; its interests and joys, its friendships and love. We thank thee for the ties that bind us to one another.

We bless thee for thy loving and patient dealings with us, whereby thou dost ever teach us thy truth and thy way, by the varied experiences through which we pass; for the meanings that lie hidden even in the very heart of sorrow, pain, disappointment, loss and grief, and for thy guiding hand along the way of our pilgrimage.

We give thee thanks for this thy son, our loved one and our friend, recalling all in him that made others love him. We thank thee for his dedication to good causes, for his courage and strength and for the varied ministries of helpfulness he performed. Especially are we grateful for all of the good that has passed from his life into the lives of others which has made the world richer for his presence.

Do thou continue to bless as thou hast already blessed his loved ones in their sorrow, that the victorious spirit in which they confront this hour of parting may inspire others to face their bereavements in the assured hope that is ours in the Gospel of Christ.

Renew now we pray thee, the great gifts of faith, patience and enduring love within us. Help us to continue to walk amid the things of this world with eyes open to the beauty and the glory of the eternal, that so, among the sundry and manifold changes in this life, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.