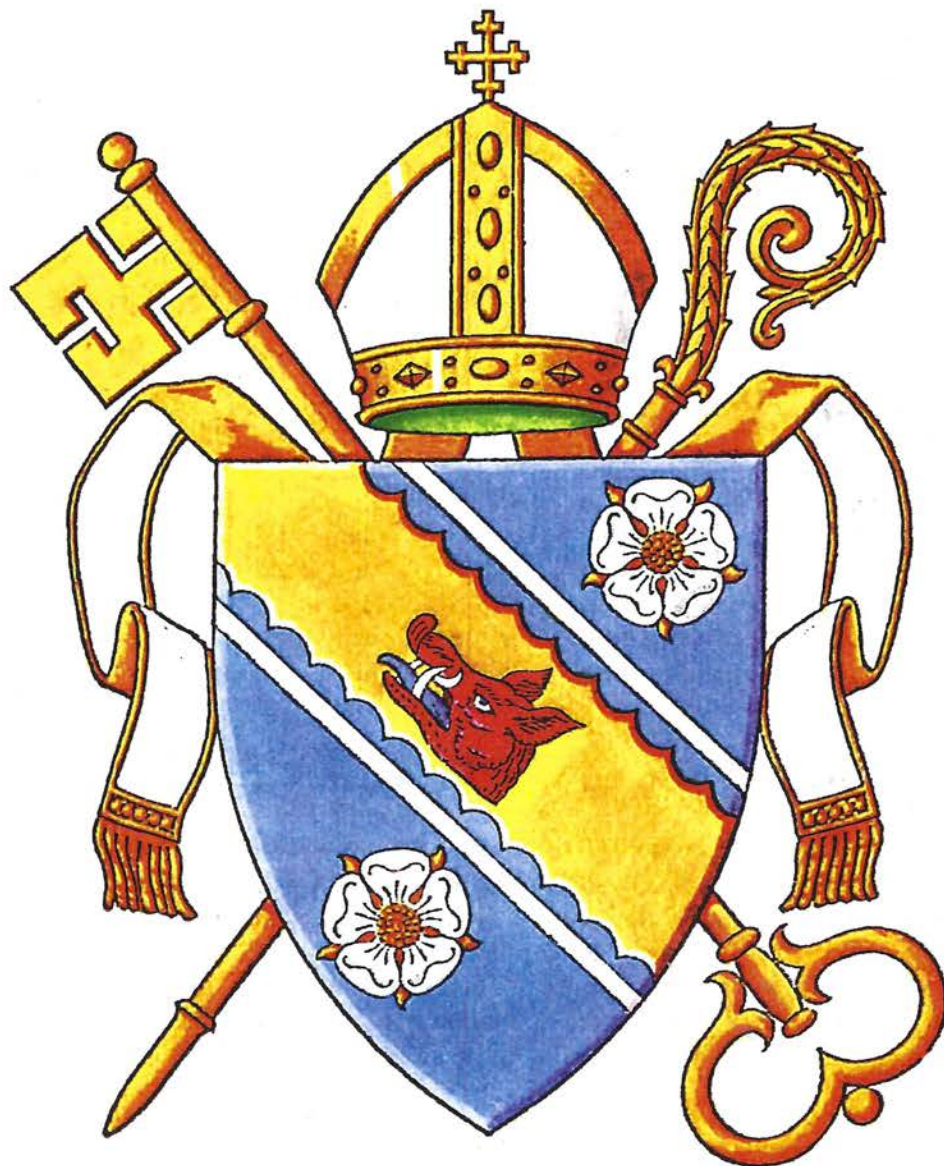


FUNERAL SERMON BY THE REVEREND LONNIE LACY

THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD  
THE RT. REV. HENRY I. LOUTTIT, JR.



*Wednesday, December 29, 2021*

*Christ Church, Savannah*



**Funeral Sermon for  
the Rt. Rev. Henry I. Louttit, Jr.**

**Preached at Christ Church Episcopal  
Savannah, GA**

**Isaiah 11:1-9**

**Psalm 148**

**Revelation 21:2-7**

**John 14:1-6**

In the Episcopal Church,  
our funerals force us to find Easter—  
to celebrate it,  
yearn for it,  
hope for it—  
to declare boldly the resurrection  
no matter the season or the circumstance.

Even if today were Good Friday,  
still, we would pull out the gold vestments,  
light up the Paschal candle,  
and make our song  
“Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!”  
because what we know, dear friends,

is that nothing can ever or will ever  
overshadow the glory of Easter  
and the promise of the resurrection.

But today is not Good Friday.  
Instead, we find ourselves  
holding an Easter liturgy  
in the middle of Christmastide.

Christmas and Easter.  
Incarnation and Resurrection.  
Poinsettias, the Paschal Candle,  
and the Real Presence of Christ  
all in one place.

This, y'all, is the liturgical jackpot . . .  
and Henry Louttit would be so pleased.

Here today  
between the crèche and the cross  
we see the whole story of the One  
who was born for us,  
who died for us,  
who rose for us,  
and who has promised to come again  
to gather us, judge us, and love us  
for all eternity.

Days like today—  
in all their unintended intersection  
and accidental beauty—  
give us a vision  
of the whole of God's plan  
and of the Bridge he has built for us  
between this life  
and the life of the world to come.

What better day could there be  
to celebrate and remember our  
bishop,  
priest,  
husband,  
father,  
grandfather,  
brother,  
uncle,  
and friend  
Henry Irving Louttit, Jr.?

\* \* \*

Of course, we are not the first  
to have a mystic vision  
of the fullness of God's plan  
or of that Bridge that stands  
between this world and the next.

As we just heard,  
Isaiah had that vision, too.  
So did David.  
So did John.

For Isaiah it was that old stump of Jesse  
springing back to life,  
pointing to a day when  
the wolf will lie with the lamb,  
the lion will graze with the ox,  
and a little child will lead them all  
in a kingdom filled with peace.

For David, it was the vision  
of all creation belting out God's glory:  
from the angels of the highest heaven  
to the sea-monsters of the deep,  
everything pouring forth  
God's eternal praise.

And for John?  
For John it was that city  
sparkling in the sky:  
a new Jerusalem for you and me,  
adorned like a bride  
coming down the aisle  
to meet her beloved groom.

If this collection of readings  
tells us anything,  
it tells us that  
**to see the Kingdom of God  
requires imagination,  
a certain kind of whimsy,  
a spiritual make-believe  
or mysticism.**

**To see the Bridge God has made  
between the world as it is  
and the world as it will one day be  
requires a unique kind of vision.**

**This was the vision  
our friend Henry  
carried in his heart.**

\* \* \*

I imagine if I asked today,  
“When was a moment in your life  
when Henry Louttit showed you  
the Kingdom of God  
or the Bridge between  
this world and the next?”  
the thought-bubbles over our heads  
would astonish and delight us,  
make us laugh and make us cry,  
and number in the thousands.

Henry Louttit saw the Kingdom of God,  
and in his unique, gentle, creative way,  
he pointed us to it as often as he could.

**Henry saw the Kingdom of God,  
and he believed it to be a place  
of gentleness and peace.**

Someone recently told me  
of a moment at Christ Church Valdosta  
when an angry neighbor of the church  
came barging into Henry's office,  
yelling about something  
they believed was wrong  
"because God said so!"

Henry never lost his cool,  
never raised his voice,  
never flinched.

He just said—quietly but firmly—  
"Well, I'm glad you heard  
God say that so clearly.  
God has not said that to me yet, though,  
so for now we're going to keep going."

Some have said  
Henry did not like confrontation,  
which may be true,  
but the greater truth is that he  
willingly, purposely, and repeatedly  
aligned himself with  
the Prince of Peace.

He also had that disarming way  
of speaking in the third person.

As a young priest I would get angry  
and complain about this person or that,  
hoping he—as my bishop—  
would take my side.

Inevitably he would sit patiently,  
grin, and say, “Now now.  
Henry and Lonnie have known  
many wonderful human beings,  
and Lonnie must remember  
that God loves all his children,  
even when Lonnie  
is frustrated with them.”

Every time!  
With gentleness and peace  
the voice of God would come through,  
and gentleness and peace  
would win every time.

**Henry saw the Kingdom of God,  
and he also believed it to be a place  
where everyone matters,  
everyone needs each other,  
and everyone has gifts to bring.**

As a shy, studious introvert,  
he hated church camp as a child  
where everything was centered on sports,  
so as an adult he helped to create  
a whole new way of doing camp where  
the scholars, artists, and poets among us  
could also find a place,  
and know themselves to be loved  
and valued by the Lord Jesus  
in community.

The crown jewel of his camp vision  
was Camp St. Gregory,  
a music camp where  
kids could learn to sing  
and explore their gifts for music.  
The lucky ones got to take recorder lessons  
with Father Louttit, and that continued  
even after he became bishop.

In the 80's and 90's at Christ Church  
he raised up women for leadership—  
lay and ordained—  
when others had not yet  
had the courage to do so.

He cultivated teens and college students  
to exercise their spiritual gifts.

As the rector of the only  
Episcopal church in Valdosta,  
he could have been territorial,  
but instead he wholeheartedly supported  
starting St. Barnabas across town,  
and he welcomed with open arms  
a young Stan White  
and his pentecostal church  
into the Episcopal fold.  
And the Episcopal Church in Valdosta grew.

As our current bishop  
is fond of mentioning,  
when Henry became bishop  
he did the unthinkable:  
he put us at *round* tables at Convention!  
With people we did not know!  
And forced us to talk, and pray,  
and come to know one another!



He taught us to value each other's gifts.  
He taught us to love one another.  
He took what once was  
a competitive ecclesiastical meeting  
and turned it into our annual  
diocesan family reunion.

**Henry saw the Kingdom of God,  
and he believed it to be a place  
where worship brings  
heaven and earth together  
and where every altar  
becomes the throne of God.**

As a priest he was a phenomenal liturgist.  
This is something those of you  
who only ever knew him as bishop  
never really got to see in full force,  
but as a priest he celebrated  
the fullness of the prayer book  
with that characteristic whimsy of his,  
putting cacti in the windows during Lent  
to immerse us in the wilderness,  
and baptizing people by full immersion.  
(In the Episcopal Church!  
Who'd've thought?)

He made Jesus come to life for us,  
and the way he grafted the life of Jesus  
onto the lives of his parishioners  
permanently transformed  
generations of us in Valdosta.

He taught children to hold the prayer book  
and how to officiate the evening offices.

He filled dark places with candlelight  
and helped us to know and believe  
the mystery and majesty of God.

He gathered people together.  
He truly said his prayers.  
He taught us to pray, too.

**And finally,  
Henry saw the Kingdom of God,  
and he believed it to be a place of joy.**

Probably no one knew this better  
than those four women  
lucky enough to live with him.

We all knew Henry in one way or another,  
but I suspect the most wonderful version  
was the silly, joyful husband and father:

who would pretend to dance ballet  
with his girls in the living room;

who once brought a bunny home  
because its fur had a white band  
around its neck like a clergy collar,  
and taught it to use a litter box  
and walk on a leash;

who played Old Maid  
and wore a doily on his head  
any time he lost;

who took his family on nature walks  
in the mountains  
and marshes  
and beaches

and taught them to marvel  
at God's creation;

who instilled in Amy the librarian  
his love of  
literature,  
learning,  
and words;

in Katie the teacher  
his love of  
people,  
empowerment,  
and instruction;

and in Susan the priest  
his love for Christ's Body the Church;

and who loved Jan:  
beautiful, wonderful Jan,  
who loved him back fiercely;

Jan, whom he'd encountered  
plenty of times as a child  
on his father's visitations to her church  
but had always been too quiet,  
too shy to say hello;

Jan, whom he promised his  
college friend he would "look after"  
because his college friend  
was dating her at the time  
but had to go overseas;  
(apparently Henry did an excellent job);

Jan, whom Henry adored  
with a love, a gentleness, and a joy

that taught others of us  
how to love our spouses, too,  
and that rivaled John's vision  
of that bride and that groom  
at that heavenly banquet  
in the new Jerusalem.

**Henry saw the Kingdom,  
and he knew it to be a place  
of peace and gentleness,  
of unity, worship, and joy.**

\* \* \*

Somehow, ever since I was a child  
I always associated Henry with C.S. Lewis.

Maybe it's because he loved Lewis  
and taught me to love him, too.

Maybe it's because Henry's brand  
of whimsy and mysticism  
often had a lot in common with Lewis'.

Or maybe it's just because  
the guy's license plate  
said "Aslan" for all those years.

But I close with a quote from the end  
of *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*,  
in which the great lion Aslan  
tells Lucy and Edmund  
they are now too old to return to Narnia  
and must remain in our own world.

"Oh Aslan!" Lucy says.

"How can we live

never meeting you again?”  
“But you shall meet me, dear one,”  
said Aslan.

“Are-are you [in our world] too, Sir?”  
said Edmund.

“I am,” said Aslan.  
“But there I have another name.  
You must learn to know me by that name.”

“Oh, Aslan,” said Lucy.  
“Will you tell us how  
to get into your country  
from our world?”

“I shall be telling you all the time,”  
said Aslan.  
“But I will not tell you  
how long or short the way will be;  
only that it lies across a river.  
**But do not fear that,  
for I am the great Bridge Builder.”**

Brothers and sisters,  
we have seen and know  
the great Bridge Builder.

In our world,  
he is the One  
between the crèche and the cross,  
who was born for us,  
lived for us,  
died for us,  
rose for us,  
and will come again for us.

He is the One  
who goes before us  
to prepare a place for us.

We know him by his name.

**He is Jesus:  
the alpha and the omega,  
the way,  
the truth,  
and the life.**

**He is both  
the Bridge Builder  
AND the Bridge.**

He is the One to whom  
the mystics have all been pointing  
all this whole time:

Isaiah with his peaceable kingdom;  
David with his joyful creation;  
John with his new Jerusalem;

and Henry—our beloved Henry—  
with his candles and music,  
with his liturgies and prayers,  
with his vision of unity and  
fellowship despite our divisions,  
with gentleness and joy,  
with whimsy and make believe,  
with faith, and hope, and love.

**We know Jesus better—  
we see the Bridge better  
and the Kingdom more clearly—**

because Henry helped  
to point the way.

So on this day  
as Christmas and Easter collide  
and we celebrate with joy  
the fullness of our redemption,  
*rejoice . . .*

Rejoice, my friends,  
for today our  
bishop,  
priest,  
husband,  
father,  
grandfather,  
brother,  
uncle,  
and friend  
has crossed that Bridge  
and entered into Aslan's true country.

And looking now from that distant shore,  
with saints and angels  
and all the company of heaven,  
he forever makes his song,  
"Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia."

Amen.