

Isaiah 25:6-9
Romans 8:14-19, 34-35, 37-39
John 10:11-16

Good morning! I'm so glad you are here to celebrate the life of Howard Ebright.....that would be Captain Ebright of the Army Air Corps, retired; and the Reverend Fr. Howard "Muzz" Ebright, priest of the Episcopal Church. On behalf of his family I'd like to thank you for your presence in honoring this great friend of ours.

If you knew Muzz for any length of time, you'll know how he always answered the question, "How are you?" "Better than I deserve." I could have argued the point with him because I always felt he deserved all the love and goodness that came his way.

He was a Colorado native, born in Denver, and initially educated in Ft. Collins at what is now Colorado State University. But the war intervened. He responded by becoming what we would today call a "fly boy." Back then they were called heroes. Muzz flew almost 70 missions over Germany as a fighter pilot, one of an entire generation of men working to save the world from Nazi conquest.an entire generation of men and women, like the young Marjorie Skitch who was stationed then in Belgium.

Muzz met his future wife, Marge, in Belgium, both in uniform; both in the army. He was a fly-boy; she a nurse. The war ended soon after they met and soon they married while he finished his undergraduate degree in Forestry. Muzz would eventually earn a Master's degree in Botany.

He loved the outdoors, working early on – in various locations – for the US Forest Service. In fact, the birthplaces of Muzz and Marge's children reads like a survey of the national park system. Lynnda was born at Mt. Rainer National Park in Washington; Marty, at Rocky Mountain National Park here in Colorado. Muzz was no longer with the Forest Service when Mark was born, but I'm sure a national park was not far away.

Muzz may have loved the outdoors. But he loved people, too. So he earned a Master's degree in Social Work from DU, the University of Denver. Many years later in Grand Junction he was one of the pioneers of the suicide hotline, working any hour of the day or night to help those in crisis who wanted to end their lives. Muzz helped them because he loved people.

In between these two advanced degrees, Muzz completed seminary studies in Chicago. He was ordained in 1968 and began assisting at his home parish, then in Michigan. With the children grown and on their own, Muzz and Marge moved back to Colorado – to Grand Junction – in 1976. Immediately Bill Foster, priest and rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, recruited Muzz to assist there, at St. Matt's. Similarly Muzz was recruited by a group of young people who wanted to start another Episcopal church in town. So he became the first priest of Church of the Nativity at its founding on Easter Sunday 1977.

Muzz was somewhat legendary for being unorthodox. He favored pastel-colored clergy shirts instead of the typical all-black. He favored equal rights for all people – how unorthodox – and so participated in Dr. Martin Luther King's March on Washington in 1963, not necessarily a

safe thing for a white man to do. Though a soldier of the US Army, he eventually joined the A5: Americans Against Armed Aggression Anywhere.

One of his more unorthodox sermons is rather well known. He said one Sunday morning: "God loves you. Are there any questions?" Some in the congregation today, especially those of us wearing clerical collars, may think: "Well, not much sermon prep went into that one, right?" OK, but consider this: that sermon is quite likely the one most often quoted in the Diocese of Colorado in its entirety!

As an outdoorsman, Muzz loved to fish: fly fishing. He made his own elaborately tied flies. And yet for all his love of the outdoors, there is a little plaque that greets visitors by the front door of the Ebright house that says: "Here lives an old fisherman with the catch of his life."

Muzz loved his family: a wife of too many years to mention because it will embarrass her; three children; three grandchildren; two great-grandchildren. He wanted to do good to others: family or not, it didn't matter. Like the rest of us, he didn't always get it right. But his motives were pure.

Probably the word I've used most often today in talking about Muzz Ebright is the word "love." He was and is a man known for his love of the outdoors; love and care for other people; love and tenderness for his family. But if you add up all this you still have less than half of this man. At his core and center was the love of God.

I can't think of a time when the church doors were open that Muzz and Marge Ebright weren't here. He wasn't one to wear his religiosity on his sleeve, however. It flowed deeply in him, far deeper than the Colorado streams in which he fished. Even far along in infirmity, when a minister of this parish brought him Holy Communion at home and said a portion of the Eucharistic prayer, he would mouth the words as they were being said: deeply imbedded; deeply remembered.

He felt that God was big enough to love everybody. Boy if that's not unorthodox, I don't know what is. Most of us find ways to exclude those who don't measure up to our notions of Christianity. Most of us find ways to condemn those who just don't meet our expectations of how a Christian should act or behave. I never found that in Muzz.

I never heard him say a bad word about anyone. Well, there was sorta one time, maybe. I had invited a guest preacher and because I tend to listen better with my eyes closed, I wasn't aware that this gentleman was moving around quite a bit as he preached: back and forth; up to the altar and back down. After the service I asked Fr. Muzz what he thought of our guest. His reply with that ever characteristic twinkle in his eye: "Did that man wear a rut in the carpet?"

That's a kind of whimsy born of a smart mind, and a settled soul: the kind of whimsy and intellect of a man who never took himself, or anyone else, too seriously, while maintaining an unyielding temperament of love and care. So in his honor I'd like to ask you all today: How are you? (Better than I deserve.)