
The Broken Body

A Sermon preached at a Memorial Service for Drew Everson in Duke University Chapel on October 27, 2010

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An ancient saint of the church said, “The glory of God is a human being fully alive.” Jesus said “I came that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

For all who knew Drew Everson, and for all who loved him, and for all who now, in his death, realize perhaps for the first time how much they truly loved him, these words contain the full glory and the absolute horror of this moment. Up until that unspeakable catastrophe last Thursday night, Drew was fully alive, was living life to the full, like almost no one else. When Isaiah speaks of those who shall fly with wings like eagles, shall run and not be weary, shall walk and not faint, Drew is the picture that comes into our mind. Everyone wanted to be his friend, because everyone hoped his life-force was infectious. Everyone dreamed they too could be smart like him, handsome like him, well-dressed like him, fun like him, musical like him, funny like him, charming like him, persuasive like him, above all *alive* like him.

Every student at Duke knows that the undergraduate years are the vortex of our lives. There’s tremendous pressure to cram into them every ounce of experience and passion and delight and discovery imaginable. We all know it’s an absurd quest and the self-imposed pressure it exerts can be damaging and debilitating. But then you meet a young man like Drew, who is so bursting with life it feels he’s bursting *out* of life.

And now he *has* burst out of life. And somehow *because* he was so profoundly *alive*, his death is that much harder to take in, because it’s an affront, a contradiction, an insult; a door slammed in the face of everything we believe and want to believe about life. This cannot be. But it is.

It is. The door has been slammed in the face of everything we believe and want to believe about life. Drew’s dynamic, exponential, explosive future is now past. The careering, irrepressible, sizzling race-car of his life is now suddenly stationary – and deafeningly silent.

On Sunday afternoon I sat in the outdoor gathering area of Duke Hospital with a handful of Drew’s closest friends and we shared memories and stories and shattered dreams. We finally fell to talking about Scotch whisky. If you asked what Drew wanted for Christmas, he’d say Scotch. And not just any old Scotch. The most exquisite single malt whisky. He loved the taste, the expense, the class, the whole cachet of exclusive Scotch. And in my mind I pictured a bottle of whisky, and saw Drew in it. Think about that bottle of whisky with me for a moment. It’s pretty classy. Drew was pretty classy. He liked fashion. I asked his friends why he was looking at a career in finance, and they told me he needed a certain level of income to keep himself. He liked to look the part. He was a classy guy. Now think how precious a fine bottle of Scotch whisky is. Think about how precious Drew was – how everyone wanted to be with him, be like him, be around him. He was so precious.

Now open out that bottle and taste the whisky inside. If you were one of those Drew really allowed to get inside his soul, one of those who really got to taste what was inside, count your blessings today. That’s a pretty select and rare circle. Think about what whisky tastes like on the tongue. It has wave upon wave of flavor, taste, and aftertaste, and deep, satisfying warmth that gives you a second and a third jolt some while after you’ve tasted and even swallowed it. Wasn’t that Drew? There was the surface level, with his wit and charm, and then there was the aftertaste with his style and intelligence, and then yet a third satisfying warmth with extraordinary traits like cello-playing and concern for the debating team at East Chapel Hill and even regard for the wellbeing of the Muslim community at Duke in the face of half-crazed pastors in his home state of Florida.

Whisky is about flavor, about passion, about good times, about consolation, about depth, about something a bit special. That’s why I associate it with Drew.

But there’s one simple, unavoidable, unspectacular, but ultimately horrifying thing about a bottle of whisky. If you drop it on a stone surface from any kind of height, it will break. The glass will shatter and scatter, and the precious, warm, satisfying, classy liquid will be poured out and wasted on the ground. And that’s what has now, unimaginably, happened to Drew. He fell, and we are faced with shattering, unspeakable, irretrievable waste.

We live in a technological age where nothing is lost – telephones retrieve calls, emails are rescued from trash, computer hard drives are preserved, cameras find old deleted photographs, touchdowns missed on the live broadcast are replayed endlessly in slow motion. But not in real life. In real life the bottle of Scotch drops and shatters and there's no picking it up again.

So where is our hope today? The center of the Christian faith lies in another young man. He died not among hundreds of wellwishers, but amongst enemies and almost alone. His body was shattered like a precious glass bottle; and his blood trickled out like whisky emerging slowly from the wreckage. Somehow he knew this was going to happen to him, and the night before he died, at an event we call the Last Supper, he took bread, and broke it to represent the breaking of his body. And he also took wine, and poured it out to represent his trickling, wasted, seeping blood. And he said, "Do this, and remember me." And then he said, "We will do this again, together, in glory."

And there lies his precious promise, that he will remake our broken bodies out of his fragile broken body, and he will transfuse our spilt and wasted blood with his most precious blood. And so our shattered brokenness will be taken up into his glory, and our ceaseless hemorrhaging will be incorporated into his heart.

And the word he gave us to focus our hope is simply "remember." Do this, he said, and re-member. Listen closely: "re-member." Break bread, pour wine, or whisky – and re-member. Put the members of that broken body back together again as you eat together. That is our hope. Not that Drew isn't broken. We know he is. But that he will be re-membered in God. That's what resurrection is – God putting all our members back together, and literally re-membering us. Even if we're as shattered and irreparable as a broken bottle.

So remember Drew. It's the best thing you can do. Remember him in debate, at basketball, in fraternity, in Inside Joke, in the clothes store, at a party, on Wall Street. Re-member Drew. Pour yourself a whisky and re-member Drew. And ask God to re-member Drew. Because that is our hope. That is our only hope. That God re-members Drew. And will re-member us *with* Drew. Now. And forever.