

A number of years ago,
a couple of moves ago
before coming to the Durham/Wallingford area,
Bill got a nice promotion and
he and Betty moved to beautiful Williamsburg VA,
a place that I, and I'm betting many of you, have visited.

Anyone who's seen their spread in Durham
won't be surprised to learn that their home in Williamsburg had acreage too,
the better for gardening.
When they moved in that fall, it looked a bit drab by their lights.
Sure, there were enough shrubs and such,
but nothing prepared them for a Virginia spring.

It blooms a good month – no, make that six weeks –
earlier than here in New England,
which in itself is a most pleasant surprise.
All the more so in Bill and Betty's large yard
which exploded into a riot of glorious color --
white dogwoods, azaleas pink and white, redbud trees and red camellias.

All that beauty had been there all along,
yet still startling to behold as it arose – literally – into the glory it was created to be.
It was a glorious new season of renewed hope and life.
What we as Christians call *resurrection*.

Friends, this is Betty's story –
or shall I say, a pale imitation of it.
It's a story Betty would sometimes use, to very good effect I'm sure,
in funeral homilies before she retired from full-time ministry.
I pray that my second-hand version of it today
brings back enough memories to give her some comfort,
or at least remind her of the original.

But I know with all my heart that it is Bill's story, *now*,
even more than when he tended that lovely spit of ground in VA.
By the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus,
by the truth of the season we call Easter,
it is Bill's story now.
Now, as he has entered a life more glorious than we could ask for or imagine.

A life that he prepared for in all the seasons of this life,
spent with you,
those he loved best.

As sister clergy, I imagine Betty and I could easily bore the rest of you
discussing our favorite parts of the Prayer Book.
She, for instance, specifically asked for the prayers we'll soon pray, led by Emily.
I really like the section called "the proper preface"
at the beginning of the Eucharistic prayer,
right before the sanctus (or "holy, holy, holy").
Maybe you can listen for it
as it simply states the profound hope
that life is "changed, not ended". *Changed, not ended.*

And, as much as you will miss Bill,
as surely as you will always love Bill,
his life is now changed, not ended,
just as gloriously, just as remarkably,
as that beloved yard in Williamsburg.

That's the great good news Betty wants each of you to hear today.
And that's the great good news we're here to proclaim back to her –
back to you, Betty, and the family now when you need it most.

Thanks be to God for the gift of William "Bill" Long Sr.,
and the gift of having known and loved him for a season.

#