

# Preparing for Our Jubilee

## Two from Our Cloud of Witnesses

Both Written by Dale

### *Celebrating the Life of J.G. Pinkerton*

From “This Week,” November 10<sup>th</sup>, 2008

This past weekend we gathered to remember and celebrate the loving life of J.G. Pinkerton. J.G. was my friend and my elder, but he was much more like a father to me. He was my confidant, my spiritual adviser, and my benefactor in many, many ways. And I will miss him greatly. Wednesday morning as I struggled to absorb his passing, I walked into our church building for the first time in my life knowing he would not be here again, at least in person. So I made the circuit of the building. I walked into the chapel down to his seat. I walked downstairs to our classroom and just stood and looked at where he always sat. Just thinking and feeling and remembering. And being thankful—thankful to God that this great, good man was part of my life for so long, that I had had a man this wise to be my primary life teacher.

More than anyone, J.G. is to be credited with the extraordinary story of the Stamford Church of Christ: for our efforts to be the safest place on earth; for the acceptance that people find here; for the openness and freedom of our Bible studies; for the courage and honesty to ask hard questions here; for our diversity, for our learning to respect our differences and learn from our differences; and for the way women are respected here as fully as men. I noted at J.G.’s funeral service on Saturday that ten years ago right now we were making the transition to gender equality in the face of angry opposition from some other Churches of Christ around the nation. That we made such a transition and made it so smoothly is, in large measure, a testimony to the wisdom of J.G. We are who we are because of him.

There are, I know, many ministers who believe what I believe and know what I know, but far too often there is no elder to empower them, encourage them, and insist on their being heard. Here there was such an elder. Through his commitment to freedom of thought and basic honesty, this church charted a different course where no one would be discriminated against on the basis of birth, and where the focus would be on that which brings people together rather than on that which divides them. Through his vigilant shepherding, he over and over valiantly defended our church family against those who would attack, divide or undermine it. In the midst of crises, his was the steady hand that assured us that all would be well and his was the heart that found ways out of conflict to reconciliation.

So how will we carry on without J.G.? J.G. planned for that too. He took care of that too. He filled all of us, several of us in particular, with his soul so that his wisdom will live on in our church family for many years to come. Years from now, those who know

and remember will still realize that we are being shepherded by J.G. Pinkerton. We will be alright. We will be alright because of J.G.'s foresight and wisdom.

I also noted both Saturday and Sunday that J.G., I am confident, died as he would have wished, half-way to heaven already, caught up to meet the Lord in the air, doing what he loved most—traveling, and especially traveling to be with family. He died “in flight.” He died on eagles’ wings. And now (in the words of Isaiah 40:31), he walks and does not become faint. He runs and does not grow weary. He soars on wings like eagles.

J.G. has fought the good fight. He has finished the race. He kept the faith. He taught us right from wrong, and weak from strong. All the way to the end. He has the scars, the wounds, to prove. And now there is in store for him the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to him on that day—and not only to him, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

### ***In Bill We Saw Jesus***

From “The Week,” November, 2016

When people were new to our church family and I would try to explain who Bill Cochran was, it was fairly simple, “You know, the guy up front that looks – and sounds – like a United States Senator.” That never failed; they always knew who I meant.

This week we honor Bill as a friend, a mentor, a husband and a father. He served as an elder in our church family from September 1993 until his retirement just a few weeks ago, his retirement now an evident part of his preparation for his great homecoming. His almost twenty years of service as our elder is second-longest to J.G. Pinkerton’s.

Often when I thought of Bill, I kept coming back in my mind to the climax of the Alfred, Lord Tennyson poem “Ulysses.” The great Greek hero Ulysses had already had all the amazing adventures any person could dream of having. He considers settling down, but he realizes in the words of the poem, “Some work of noble note, may yet be done.” So to his companions he says, “Come, my friends, ’Tis not too late to seek a newer world. ...

Though much is taken, much abides; and though  
We are not now that strength which in old days  
Moved heaven and earth, that which we are, we are –  
One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

That to me is Bill, in his ongoing commitment to whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – to all that is excellent and praiseworthy. He retired from his distinguished career with Union Carbide and then threw himself with full passion into providing leadership for his church family. Whatever life force he had, he gave. Down to the end. Last Thursday just when

he had been put back on hospice care, I said to him, “Well, it looks like for a little while we’re getting a little more help for you.” Already a bit unstable in mind and body, Bill still caught the concept of “help” and answered, “Well, I guess I could still be some help to someone if they needed it.” He could not fathom needing help; he lived to help. Made weak by time and fate, he was still strong in will. To his last breath.

I could commend him for many other things. I choose only two.

First, Bill was always the fastest guy in the room (in any room) to admit it when he was wrong (sometimes too fast; often in such cases he wasn’t wrong!). I don’t even know who was second-best to Bill on this. But if Bill even sensed that he was out of line, or that he might have been wrong, or that he might have hurt someone, he apologized immediately. I don’t know why Bill was so good at this, and most of us aren’t. I would say Bill had no ego he felt the need to protect. He had no need to defend or promote himself. In losing himself in the spirit of Jesus, he had truly found himself. And so in him we saw Jesus.

Second, well, first, a very brief preamble. For many years Bill was over here at the building most days of the week, rain or shine, working on the grounds, beautifying specifically our new wing. That was commendable enough, but here’s what is really amazing. Back in the late 1990s, Bill was the last guy in the room to sign on to our building project. There were visionary people who saw the dream for our new wing. Bill wasn’t one of them. For some good reasons. In his integrity he insisted on our not doing what would leave future generations heavily indebted. Hmm, back to that U.S. Senator idea! But when he saw a way it could all be done without heavy indebtedness, he was the one who saw it through. He finished what was not his dream. What others dreamed of, he accomplished. That is not usual. Not his project, not his dream, became his project, his dream. Again, in losing himself, he found himself. And in him we saw Jesus.

So now, Bill, “Though much is taken, much abides. ...

’Tis not too late to seek a newer world. ...

Some work of noble note, may yet be done.”

Now you have found the newer world. You always did. And works of note will yet be done. For those of us left behind, though much is taken, because of you, dear friend, much abides.