

## THE MAN WHO PREACHED GRACE GREATER THAN OUR SINS

The Reverend Joe Parsons, that big preacher with white hair and broad shoulders, who visited in our home through the years, was buried today in Anderson, South Carolina. Neither banners waved nor flags flew half-mast, there were no reporters to write about this seemingly uneventful death of a small town preacher man-- Joe Parsons.

The funeral was simple with two songs and a eulogy-sermon that spoke of the love Brother Joe had for the church, sinners, preachers and the gospel. Brother Joe believed in the church, and in his ministry always referred back to participation in the local church for all believers. He loved sinners - preferring to put his arms around a drunk and weep while telling him that he and the Lord both loved him. He loved preachers. Brother Joe never criticized messengers of God regardless how immorally wrong or unjust. Brother Joe never threw stones. Oh, it was not that he was afraid of sin but the love of God so prevailed in his heart that he would rather love a person to the Lord than to rebuke him to the cross. God had given him a unique understanding of the scriptures. Unlike many of his preacher colleagues he approached freely without any preconceived ideas or notions but took the gospel for what it was- God's love to man. Brother Joe became the gospel himself- the Good News incarnated in the flesh as he loved others as Christ, himself loved others.

I loved Brother Joe for many reasons. One reason was that he loved the unlovely. Many who attended the funeral revealed this love. The seemingly poorest shed the biggest tears. Secondly, I loved him because he dared to be different. His message was not the typical Bible-belt preaching. Yet, even though, rid of legalism and rigid structures, he did not advocate cheap grace. Thirdly, Brother Joe Parsons spent time with the Lord every morning from 3 a. m. until 7 a. m., praying, studying and talking to God. Lastly, he loved my Father and my Father was his disciple. Dad was nurtured out of legalism into grace and freedom by Brother Joe. And because of that freedom that was so encouraged in Dad by Brother Joe, I live freely ~~without~~ without fear of structures and legalism.

I cried today, not out of sadness for him, but because of the fact that if I died today, my eulogy would be so less Christlike, so worldly and selfish. I cried because I wanted to become compassionate- to love the sinner and hate the sin. I cried today because of my own dry and stale devotional life.

The life of Joe Parsons, even in memories as eulogies are preached and hymns are sung, even without an invitation, inspired me to want to become a better child of God- to walk closer to Him. What a better commentary on the life of a preacher than to realize that even though dead, his Christlike spirit is still speaking to draw men to God. Amen!

No, there were no newspaper reporters, not even a representative from the Baptist Convention- just a group of people who were closer to the truth because they had known and loved Brother Joe Parsons. Thank you, Lord, for choosing him to be yours.

--- written by Linda McKinnish Bridges  
after returning home from the  
funeral on November 12, 1977.