

## *A Homeless Man's Place in the Kingdom of God*

The ashes of a homeless man who engaged in a prolonged legal fight to regain the residence he'd signed away while drunk were interred Dec. 3 in the columbarium of the "church of the presidents," St. John's, Lafayette Square, Washington, D.C.

Every day for 15 years William Wallace Brown, Jr., 68, had walked from the porch of the historic church to Capitol Hill to display a poster board of newspaper headlines about stubbornness, heroism and justice denied. A large man who loved jazz throughout his years of employment with an electric company and bagging groceries, he always returned to the porch of the historic church.

It was there, on a morning in 1989, that he spoke to President George

Bush. He asked for the president's prayers, only to hear the chief executive invite him to "come inside with us and pray."

Soon Mr. Brown was a regular communicant at the 8 a.m. Sunday Eucharist, regularly putting a crumpled dollar bill in the silver collection plate. More often than not, it was money he had accepted from passers-by, once with hands so stiff from the cold that he was unable to put on gloves that one man offered.

"He really understood that the kingdom of God is for all of us," said the celebrant at Mr. Brown's funeral service, the Rev. Luis Leon, rector of St. John's. "It doesn't matter about ethnic background, race or class — all the things that we allow to divide us but that in God's eyes are not really important."

A parishioner, Dolph Hatfield, invited Mr. Brown for a meal every Sunday after church and took him shopping for food. It was Mr. Hatfield who read the lesson (Zechariah 14:4-9) to a dozen others who had befriended Mr. Brown, including two former congressmen, a nuclear scientist and a prominent patent attorney.

Ended at last was Mr. Brown's prolonged obsession with the attorney who allegedly swindled him out of the house left by Mr. Brown's family and resisted court-ordered payment. St. John's bell tower tolled solemnly on the gray, chilly day as the simple urn was carried to a small plot bordering the landmark church where every president since James Madison has worshiped.

*(The Rev.) James B. Simpson*

# Mulberry Street United Methodist Church

Email the Pastor: [rod.buchanan@MulberryUMC.org](mailto:rod.buchanan@MulberryUMC.org)

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Sermons

## IN SEARCH OF THE LEAST AND THE LOST

*Luke 15:1-10*

Last year a former homeless man was buried at the prestigious St. John's Episcopal Church, across from the White House. St. John's is called the "church of presidents" since nearly every U.S. leader since James Madison has worshiped there. In an unusual memorial, former members of Congress and prominent professionals attended the burial of William Wallace Brown, Jr. Someone had swindled Brown out of his house 15 years ago, and he had lived on the streets ever since. One Sunday morning he spotted, then president, George H. W. Bush entering the church and asked the former president to pray for him. Bush looked at him for a moment and said, "No. Come inside with us and pray for yourself." After that, William Brown became a regular attender at the 8:00 a.m. service and always placed a crumpled dollar bill in the silver offering plate. At his funeral, Dolph Hatfield, a member of the church who befriended Brown, said: "the homeless and the most important are one and the same." Hatfield introduced himself to Brown after another parishioner snubbed him. He became Brown's best friend, inviting him for a meal or taking him grocery shopping after church. The pastor who conducted the service said that Brown, "really understood that the kingdom of God is for all of us. It doesn't matter about ethnic background, race, or class — all the things that we allow to divide us, but that in God's eyes are not really important."

## Homeless man buried at prestigious church

*Religion Today*

Wednesday, December 6, 2000

A former homeless man has been buried at a prestigious Washington, D.C., church. William Wallace Brown, Jr., who died Oct. 17 at age 68, was given a permanent resting place in the burial garden at St. John's Episcopal Church, across from the White House, according to *The Washington Post*. St. John's is called the "church of presidents" since nearly every U.S. leader since James Madison has worshiped there.

Former members of Congress and prominent professionals attended the burial service Dec. 3. Brown "really understood that the kingdom of God is for all of us," Rev. Luis Leon said. "It doesn't matter about ethnic background, race, or class – all the things that we allow to divide us but that in God's eyes are not really important."

Brown lived on the streets for 15 years, insisting that a lawyer swindled him out of his house, the *Post* reported. In 1989, he spotted George Bush entering the church and asked the president to pray for him. "No," Bush answered, according to church members. "Come inside with us and pray for yourself." Brown became a regular at the 8 a.m. service and always placed a crumpled dollar bill in the silver collection plate.

In the eyes of God "the homeless and the most important are one and the same," said church member Dolph Hatfield, who read from the Bible during Brown's service. Hatfield introduced himself to Brown after another parishioner snubbed him, and became Brown's best friend, inviting him for a meal or taking him grocery shopping after church, the *Post* reported.

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