**A Homily in Celebration of the Life of Jochen Kraske**

**1 Corinthians 13, Psalm 23, John 14:1-6**

**Church of the Redeemer, Bethesda, Maryland August 20, 2023 David Schlafer**

1. ***Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

**These words of St. Paul are often heard at weddings.**

**They have particular resonance today, however,**

 **as we gather to give great thanks for the life of Jochen Kraske.**

**Uttered in the abstract, Paul’s words can sound unduly idealistic—**

 **impractical, impossible, even.**

**Nobody can actually bear, believe, hope, let alone endure “all things”—**

 **even over time, let alone all at once.**

**Paul’s phrase seems to be the kind you often find on a Hallmark card;**

 **but seldom, if ever, find alive and well in human beings.**

***Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things—***

**that seems a stretch, to say the least!**

**And yet---with a minor, clarifying alteration in the wording,**

 **Paul’s phrase IS an apt description of the one whom today we honor as we grieve his passing.**

**In the life of Jochen Kraske, love HAS, with quiet, unassuming, relentless tenacity,**

 **borne, believed, hoped, and endured with grace and strength.**

 **And it has done so in the midst of the things that have come his way.**

 **What St. Paul names as the qualities of love—well, Jochen has lived them:**

 ***Patient, kind—not envious, boastful, arrogant, or rude—***

**These constitute a character description of the Jochen who,**

 **because of how well HE has loved, WE have come to love so well.**

1. ***Patient, kind, not envious, boastful, arrogant or rude—***

 **such personal identity markers seldom appear in published obituaries.**

**Obituaries, usually and properly, feature professional credentials—**

 **activities undertaken, roles inhabited, accomplishments achieved, honors accorded.**

**Of these Jochen has, of course, more than his share.**

 **A sampling appears in today’s service leaflet.**

**But making my way through his memoirs that focus on his growing-up years;**

 **I see, in JOCHEN’S life, St. Paul’s words about love BROUGHT to life.**

**I’d be remiss if I didn’t quote you the dedication that appears on Page One:**

 ***To my beloved Huda: Irresistible force that transformed me—and made me write this story.***

**What a story it is! Were it mine, I’d have found it daunting indeed tobear up under,**

 **to keep belief and hope alive in, and still to endure, regardless*.***

1. **An annual experience in Jochen’s early childhood could well have set the tone.**

 **Jochen was a Christmas baby, born on December 25th.**

 **For his family the celebration of Christmas was the focal point of the entire year.**

 **It was eagerly anticipated and painstakingly prepared for over many months of lead up.**

 **It was fondly remembered and repeatedly reflected on through many months of follow up.**

**The day itself brought for the Kraske children anything but instant gift-opening gratification.**

 **Rather, a day-long ritual of family singing, eating, talking,**

 **performance-presenting by the children.**

 **All the while, wrapped gifts were on full display, set out on tables, one each for each child.**

 **Not one gift touched until all the formal festivities had finally been concluded.**

**If anything can nurture in children the interplaying disciplines of**

 **bearing, believing, hoping, enduring;**

 **the planning for, dreaming about, working toward,**

 **and e-LONG-ated celebrating of Christmas in the Kraske household—**

 **that’s about the most effective preparation training for life and love that I can imagine.**

1. **And that training would be extensively and severely tested for Jochen and his family.**

 **The clouds of World War II darkened, its storm broke with savage protracted fury;**

 **and its aftermath of devastation lingered on and on.**

 **Time and again, the Kraske family had to undergo one uprooting after another;**

 **often with extended periods of separation from each other.**

**Amid the falling of bombs, the maneuvers of troops, the fleeing of refugees,**

 **the vast disintegration of social infrastructure—in all these things,**

 **Jochen, over and over endured a juxtaposition of extreme hardship and gracious hospitality.**

**Various friends and family members offered to one another such resources as they could;**

 **dire circumstances, immanent threat notwithstanding.**

**In each new setting of multi-dimensional disorientation, Jochen settled in,**

 **took on the role of loving son, brother, nephew in the many families that welcomed him.**

1. ***Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.***

**Throughout his formative years, Jochen received, assimilated, and shared**

 **what gives fresh, if unusual meaning to the phrase: TOUGH LOVE.**

 **Love not as a fuzzy feeling; but love as a dogged fact.**

 **Love not as individual self-focused infatuation; but love as intentional communal practice.**

 **Love that is grounded in gift and sacrifice, a reciprocity of grace and gratitude.**

**Without ostentation Jochen describes this love practicing in a memoir filled**

 **with account after account of bearing, believing, hoping, enduring—**

 **Jochen’s life has been a paying forward of the love he has been granted.**

1. **Here is Jochen speaking for himself:**

 ***My experience of being hungry and living with shortages,* he says,**

 ***has had a profound effect on my character.***

 ***For the rest of my life, I have not taken the availability of life’s necessities for granted.***

***With every meal I enjoy, I remember the time when I lacked food.***

***Every bar of chocolate is a reminder of the days when I could only dream of such items.***

***When I see food being wasted, I feel it as a betrayal of the effort we made***

 ***to scrounge for food and to cherish what was available to us.***

**As I listen to Jochen’s story, I hear a clear connection, do you,**

 **with his vocation at the World Bank.**

**A vocation to make tangible, practical, the means of sustenance to those in need;**

 **to extend far and wide hospitality under conditions of hardship.**

**Practical, factual love, with his friends, his family, his beloved Huda—**

 **this love trajectory was on full display the day Jochen took leave of this life,**

 **and transitioned into Larger Life.**

**With quiet dignity he engaged his family members,**

 **promising that his love would continue with each of them going forward.**

**Love, as found in Jochen, bears, believes, hopes, endures—and it does so in all things.**

1. **St. Paul has more to tell us about the nature of love.**

***Love never ends,* he declares. Everything else, partial as it is, fades away or is superseded.**

**Not love. Love endures—not as a concept, not as a feeling, not simply as a set of memories.**

**No, love endures as the most basic of cosmic realities and truths—**

 **embodied, instantiated, transmitted in the likes of Jochen Kraske.**

1. **Facing his own execution, walking himself in the valley of the shadow of death,**

 **addressing the terrified despair of his closest friends;**

 **Jesus quietly assures them that the Divine Love that lives in him is inextinguishable.**

***Let not your hearts be troubled;* he gently urges them.**

 ***Believe in God, believe also in me.***

 ***In my father’s house there are many dwelling place.***

 ***If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?***

 ***And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself;***

 ***that where I am, there you may be also.***

**There, we believe, is Jochen now, living in Love’s Center,**

 **even as the imprint of his love abides in us, continues to connect us to him,**

 **and reminds us that, come what may,**

 **we too are enfolded in the Everlasting, Eternally Enduring Love of God.**

**Thank you, God, for loving us through Jochen.**

**Thank you, Jochen, for being to us a bearer of God’s love.**