

A Witness to the Christian Gospel at the Death of Edgar Davis
John 14:1-4, 18-19, 25-27
November 9, 2013
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One of the distinguishing features of the life of Edgar Davis was its length, only a few months short of ninety-eight years. That's a long time, and when I last saw him in Self Hospital several months back he was planning another comeback with Goldie's steadfast help. It may have been one of the reasons he married a considerably younger woman as his second wife! He lived through a century of wars and served in the second world war in artillery. That could give you a hard edge.

My several visits to Edgar were at the nursing home and often accompanied by the faithfulness of Fred Alewine whose visits to Edgar were frequent. Fred was always impressed that Edgar worked for General Motors for forty years during *the good years* when what was good for GM was good for the country and the retirement benefits were generous, and as we know, those days are gone and not likely to return.

Just yesterday Goldie told me that not long after their marriage Edgar asked to drive her Honda. When he came back the Japanese car was no more, and in its place a new Chevrolet. Edgar, it appears was a man of action, and not likely to ask permission if no one was looking or he thought he could get away with it! I'm told he disinterred the first Mrs. Davis, put her on the back of a truck and transferred her from Georgia to the Turkey Creek Baptist cemetery near Ware Shoals without so much a permit or permission from anyone. Probably broke several laws. After his arrival and her re-burial, Edgar then spent untold hours refurbishing the cemetery grounds at personal expense so in the end it was a good deal for all. I assume his motivation is that he wanted her buried in the sacred soil of South Carolina near his family. One of the advantages of having Edgar die before her is that Goldie is now free from the fear of being dug up and relocated to parts unknown or of having her casket fall off the back of a truck.

Like many of his generation Edgar was a joiner. Join the Army, join the Kiwanis club in this and that town, join the Methodist Church. In his day it was still important to say *we* and not just *me*, *us* and not just *I*. Individualism has always been a streak in American culture, but in Edgar's generation it was modified by the experience of a large and close-knit extended family which he cherished and the fact that it took all of them working as one to defeat the Axis powers. And, when they came from the war, they built families and schools and careers and all the volunteer

do-good organizations that built up a reserve of social capital in a thousand local projects. It's easy to label them as conventional until you examine what a keen sense of duty and public service was theirs and what benefits they left us.

It was also a delight yesterday to meet Troy Davis, Edgar's nephew, and his wife Olive who I soon found out is sister to my colleague in the ministry Rev. Lee Cothran.

One of the purposes of the church is to help people say a public Yes to Jesus Christ, and somewhere along the way Edgar said a public Yes to questions that went something like this, "Do you truly repent of your sins and accept and confess Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord? **I do.** And will you earnestly endeavor to keep God's Holy will and commandments? **I will.**"¹ Only God know the extent to which those promises were worked out in Edgar's long life. But we must also admit that there were difficult times with Edgar, particularly in his later years when his faculties failed and he was unwise in making gifts.

The gospel passage we read is from John 14, and it is the classic passage for funerals. The reasons are three. First, it puts our future in the hands of Jesus who, on other grounds, is faithful. When he says, "I go to prepare a place for you," it's good news. We have a destiny beyond death, first in heaven and ultimately in the new heavens and earth of the kingdom of God. And secondly, he promises the presence of his alter-ego, the Holy Spirit, to remain with us for guidance and strength. We are not alone. Thirdly, he grants us his peace as the antidote to every fear, "my peace I give to you."

When you are young and naive you may not think of such things, but when you are old and frail, when your memory fades and you need help to stand, such words of Jesus are great encouragement. When this life is over there's not less but more, much more ahead. Edgar is now the third World War II veteran I've buried in the past few weeks. I'm told they're passing at the rate of about a thousand a day. If you remember Edgar with good memories, cherish them. If yours are marked with pain and disappointments, let them go with God's help. I hope tomorrow or the next Sunday finds you seated in some local church, opening your hymnal and inviting God to speak to you through the Scripture, the sermon, and the fellowship. We all need the grace and kindness of God and the tolerance of those who know us best.

¹ *The Methodist Hymnal*, 1939.
