



I could tell you about the line. It went out the door and around the building, and I stood near the front in a suit that felt too tight in the collar, watching it never seem to run out. But the part of that day I actually think about, especially this time of year, is my Dad standing up to speak.

I'd seen my father speak in public plenty of times by then. I knew what he looked like when he was sure of himself. But I'd never seen him like that, up in front of a church that could not hold one more body, about to try to say something true about his own father, my Papa, with the casket sitting ten feet away from him.

He didn't reach for it. That's the thing I remember most. No note cards shaking in his hand, no clearing his throat to buy time. He talked about his Dad the lawyer first, a man who took cases nobody else in town would touch and made sure people understood the law was supposed to work for them too, not just the ones who could afford to make it work. Then he talked about Dad the father, which is a harder thing to do well in front of a crowd, because everybody in that room had their own memory of him and my father had to find the version that held all of them at once. Then he talked about Dad the friend, Dad the deacon at First Baptist for longer than most of us had been alive, Dad the man who showed up.

He wasn't performing. He was doing the one thing he'd spent his whole career learning how to do, which is stand up when it's hard and say the true thing anyway. I remember thinking, watching him, that I was looking at exactly where I came from. Not just my grandfather. Both of them.

C.S. Lewis wrote that friendship "has no survival value; rather it is one of those things which give value to survival." I think about that line differently now than I did the first time I read it. It's not really about friendship being useless. It's about the fact that none of what my grandfather built, none of it, was for his own benefit. The law practice, the deacon board, the endless conversations after church that ran twenty minutes past when everybody else had gone home. He gave that away, to people who had nothing to give back, decade after decade. That's why the parking lot ran out onto the highway. That's why my father had something to say that took no reaching for.

Papa's birthday falls on August 15, which is opening day of deer season. I think of him this time every year, and I think of my dad standing up in that church, because I don't know that I've ever seen a braver thing than a son trying to do right by his father in front of everyone who loved him too.

I hope somebody has to park on the shoulder of the highway for me one day. But if they don't, I hope somebody who loved me stands up anyway, and finds they don't have to reach for the words.

Take care,

Mason

PS: If you ever have questions or need anything, don't hesitate to reach out. I'll be glad to help.