

Echoes

All of us are familiar with echoes. Usually when we talk about echoes, we are talking about reflected sounds – what we hear because sound waves have bounced off something distant and we hear the sound twice, as in “Hellooo... helllooo”. But echoes don’t have to bounce off something distant. If there were no echoes in this room, I would sound “dead” and flat. Your ears can hear the subtle echo of my voice bouncing off the walls and it helps you locate me and yourself in this beautiful space. Musicians know this very well. Good acoustics means the right kind of echoes.

Echoes don’t have to be reflected sound. When we look at the moon what we see is a “light echo”, reflected from the sun’s light. What physicists call the “Cosmic background radiation” is really a micro-wave echo of the big-bang. The water-wave echoes from tsunamis sometimes reverberate for days. We have gotten pretty used to these other forms of echoes over the last 50 years or so – radar is reflected radio waves. Sonograms are the pictures made with reflected sound. We use micro-waves, infra-red waves, x-rays – just about any kind of energy can create an echo.

Echoes are good for locating things. Bats, whales, and dolphins depend on echoes to “see” where they are going, except that they “see” using sound, whereas we see using light. Many visually impaired people can tell when someone enters a room by the change in the echoes they hear. You or I could do the same thing - its just a matter of staying quiet and paying attention, and some practice. Echoes can also tell you more: not only can you tell where something is, you can tell its shape, and even its texture. What we know about the planet Venus we know because of echoes – nobody can go there, but we can get use echoes to tell us about something we have never seen.

Last week on Tuesday, our Dad, our Grandfather, Great-Grandfather, or friend left this life. Many of us believe that he has begun a new life in a new place, a place where he is reunited with *his* father and mother, friends from long ago like Bob Grundon, his great-grandson Henry Robert, and best of all, a place where the wait to see Ruth again will be momentary. But even if you don’t have or are unsure of that hope, I’d like to point out that all around us we can see his echoes, his reflection. It’s not a sound or light echo, but a reflection of the life he lived, here with us, for 93 years. You can call it whatever you wish – I will call it a spiritual echo. Is it real?

Take this putter, for example. It’s a rather dim reflection of something that Dad loved to do, but because of that, our lives were changed, as Dana has described. The music we listened to before the service – that was Dad’s echo. The hymns we are singing, the format of this service, the walking stick you see here, all echoes. But there are other echoes here. Most of the people in this room like chocolate ice cream and peanuts. A high percentage of us like knowing how things work, and are pretty good at putting broken stuff back together. We love music, and good jokes, and new ideas. We find people interesting and worthwhile. Those are echoes of Dad, lighting up our lives. Best of all, we find joy in loving each other as few brothers and sisters, parents, cousins, nieces and nephews, and grandchildren do. The men in this room adore their wives. The women in this room are grateful for the good men that God has given them. We ourselves, in so many ways, are echoes, reflections of the love that pervaded Dad’s life. And we are most certainly real.

One last observation about echoes: they change things. Waves reflecting from beaches make sandbars. The sounds echoing around in a violin over years and years temper the wood, amplifying and sweetening the sounds reflected to us. Close your eyes for a minute and think of the last time you saw Dad. That picture is an echo imprinted in your memory, changing you forever. We have all been changed in ways great and small by the echoes of Dad's love, and like violins, this process goes on and on, tempering and sweetening the song being played by the master's hand.

If we sit still, and think about it, we can use these echoes the same way scientists, and whales, and bats, and dolphins use echoes to "see" things that are hidden from our normal sight. We can find Dad. We can see through the clouds, into deep or high places if need be. We can tell whether he is nearby or far away. We can feel the echo of his touch. More than that, we can see his smile, hear his laugh, feel the gentle rhythm as he pats Mom's arm tenderly, and like a pebble dropped into an infinite ocean, his echo will go on forever, touching and changing more and more lives, unto the end of time.

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