

**FUNERAL SERVICE**  
**REVEREND JOSEPH RICE HALE**

**Rev 7: 9-17**

The Hale Family  
Colleagues in the Ministry and your spouses  
Mothers and Fathers  
Sisters and Brothers

I greet you in the Name of our Crucified and Risen, Lord, Jesus Christ!

In a small backyard of the City Road Chapel in London we will find the tomb of John WESLEY and on it is inscribed these words;

**IF THOU ART CONSTRAINED TO BLESS THE INSTRUMENT, GIVE GLORY  
TO GOD**

I stand here this afternoon on behalf of the people called Methodists to pay tribute, to bless the instrument, to give glory and thanks to GOD for the life and witness of JOSEPH RICE HALE, a man who had a deep passion for the ministry and commitment to his Lord.

I am very conscious that every day I sit in the chair that was once occupied by this gentle giant of Methodism and global Ecumenism.

What brings us here today is not so much GRIEF but LOVE. It is love for Joe Mary, Jeff and the Hale family. Yes, we gather here to share in your loss, to support you with our presence and our prayers but also to celebrate the life of an energetic and tireless servant of Jesus Christ.

As one of Mr. Wesley's bands of preachers, Joe had the privilege of giving leadership to the World Methodist Council for a quarter century. He had the unique ability to remember the names of Council members and would often enquire about our families. He was at home meeting Popes, Princes, Presidents and Peasants but had the rare ability to make everyone feel special.

Mary, thank you for sharing your husband with us and Jeff thanks for sharing Dad with us. We owe you a deep debt of gratitude. Our lives are richer because of him.

It is said that the living closes the eyes of the dead but the dead open the eyes of the living. Through Joe's life and witness our eyes have been opened to;

- Have a more gracious, gentle and generous spirit.
- Have a vision of a renewed Church and world where people live in Justice and Peace.
- Champion the rights of the poor, marginalized and oppressed.

While we all have our personal stories of encounter with Joe, I make bold to say that I have been touched by this champion who lived the Gospel of hope. For this reason, we will not allow the coldness of the grave to silence his voice to rob us of his wisdom and encouragement. His memory and legacy will continue to live on in our lives and ministry.

When called by God, **Joe gave himself to God's design for life and can only be described as "GOD INSPIRED". He was an example of character that emerges once in a lifetime, marked by dedication to principle, value for all life filled with hope for humanity. His spirituality brooked no separation between SOCIAL ACTION and the EVANGELICAL FAITH.**

On this occasion as we celebrate Joe's life, I believe he would want me to point you to the one who called him to ministry, **his COMPANION, SHEPHERD, REFUGE, GUIDE and STRENGTH.** The One who in times of struggle and turmoil especially when the road of life went uphill assured Joe; **"I will never leave you or forsake you. Lo, I am with you to the end of time."**

Friend, we gather in the assurance that **our God never slumbers or sleeps and that He holds us in the hollow of His hand.**

We gather in the assurance that **the Lord is near to those who are brokenhearted and He comforts those who are afflicted.**

We gather in the assurance that **Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, anyone who believes in Him shall not die but have everlasting life.**

As Methodist preacher, Joe, like all of us he knew he was a sinner in need of the saving grace of Christ because God's word says: **if we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us BUT if we confess our sin, God is gracious and faithful and will forgive us our sins and cleans us from all unrighteousness.**

He was saved by faith and therefore he could sing with confidence and assurance:

***Amazing Grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me,  
I once was lost but now I am found was blind but now I see.***

And the beloved Wesleyan hymn

***My Chains fell off my heart was free I rose went forth and followed Thee.***

As well as that song of Celebration

***When the Saints, Go Marching in.....When the Saints go marching in O Lord I want to be amongst that number when the Saints go marching in.***

Sure enough Joe **is** amongst that number. When the role is called up yonder he **will be there**.

I am also sure that Joe would tell us that our preaching is empty and our faith misplaced if it does not proclaim **HOPE and LIFE** beyond death. He **LIVED** in **HOPE** and preached Jesus.

It is for this reason that I want to briefly reflect on the thoughts of John, the beloved Disciple and writer of Revelation who was exiled on the island of Patmos during the persecution of Christians by the Romans in the first century

According to the Roman historian Tacitus, Patmos one of the islands in the Aegean Sea was a place where political offenders were imprisoned. My own life, wounds and ministry has taught me that Patmos is not just a place it is also an experience. In one of Luther's writings he says; "people say the dogs don't bite but my wounds tell me differently".

Ministry it is not easy and leaves us with many wounds, Despite Joe's effaceable character he was not excluded. Jesus says blessed are you when people exclude you, revile and persecute you for my sake.

Patmos is a place of pain, exile and suffering where we feel the winds of opposition and oppression. Patmos can break your spirit and put you down. BUT remember though John was on Patmos he refused to succumb to the authority of Caesar.

In Wesley's dictum for mission, Joe held together a holiness that knew no distinction from "social holiness". We only need to read the minutes of the WMC to see that Joe refused to be silenced or bend to the forces oppression.

As sure day follows night so the Kingdoms and powers and principalities of this world will cease and fall but the Kingdom of God will last through all eternity.

Today the mighty Roman Empire is no more and we name our dogs and cats after the once mighty Caesar's and Nero's and our children after the early disciples – John, Peter, Paul, Naomi, Ruth and Mary.

Patmos might last for a season but will soon come to an end that is what the Book of Revelation is all about. The BEAST will be defeated because but Jesus is Lord not Caesar, salvation comes from our God, who is seated on the throne and from the Lamb.

The Book of Revelation lives in that hope and is filled with the majesty, mystery about saving power and promise of eternal joy of God. When one reads Revelation one enters a world of exuberant praise and ceaseless worship – it seems to be a dress rehearsal of the heavenly realm.

Many theologians have speculated that heaven is only predestined for a small group of elected but this is not what we read in Revelation 7:9 ff **"There was an enormous crowd – no one could count all the people. They were from every race, tribe, nation and language and they stood in front of the Lamb, dressed in white robes and holding palm branches in their hands"**

The white robes and palm branches are signs of victory and triumph - John tells us that they gather in songs of praise; **"....glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and might belong to our God forever and ever.....Amen"**  
(Rev 7:12)

**“They are the people who have come through the great persecution. They stand before God’s throne and worship him day and night....the one who sits on the throne will shelter them ..... Never again will they neither hunger or thirst nor will or any heat strike them..... God will be their shepherd, and lead them to springs of life giving water and wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7: 13-17).**

This is what Joe lived for; his journey of pain and fragility has ended. God has dried his tears and he now dwells in peace and joy with God the source of his being.

I have no doubt that he preached and comforted many with the words that, **“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulations, or distress, or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or the sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present or things to come, nor powers, height or depth can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.**

When we put our trust in God – hopelessness is transformed into possibility -  
Ezekiel 37

When we put our trust in God – our limitations give way to new hope

When we put our trust in God – what seems impossible become reality – **Red sea opened for the oppressed slaves but horse and rider of the Egyptians swallowed by the sea.**

When we put our trust in God – we live in the hope of the prophets that **“every mountain will be made low, every valley exalted, all crooked places made straight, and rough places made smooth.....”**

When you put your trust in God, like Joe will hear **“behold I make all things new.....well done good and faithful servant.....enter into the joy of the eternal Kingdom.**

The best way to honor Joe is to renew our commitment to Jesus Christ who is ready to accomplish in us far more abundantly than we can ask or think.....in this life and beyond.

Listen again to what the angel says in the book of Revelation, **“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord for they rest from their labour and their deeds follow them.”**

Shakespeare (Hamlet chapter 3) once wrote; “Death is the road from which no traveler has ere returned” but he was wrong one did and his name is Jesus,

Death is not a cul-de-sac. A dead end street. It is not the end but the gateway into eternal life. It is not a full stop. It is not a punctuation mark but rather a comma in Gods scheme for those of us who put their trust in the Lord will never be separated from Him.

Joseph Rice Hale, Servant of Almighty God we salute you.

Sleep well in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection!

Amen