

Celebration of Life and Ministry of Jeremy Michael Fowler  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-11  
Psalm 23  
II Corinthians 4:16-5:9  
John 14:1-6

*None of us want to be here this afternoon*, and yet, here we are, all these threads and circles and connections, all in this room, and all here because of Jeremy. And so, we gather to celebrate his life and the ways he touched all of us. So, I'd like to start by asking you to **call out a word, an image, or an adjective that describes Jeremy**. (*pause*)

Hold these in mind.

**Jeremy Michael Fowler**, born September 2, 1975. He would **grow up in Kansas** with his parents, Debbie and Wayne, sister Amy and brother Jeff. He would **form lifelong friendships** there, especially through the theatre department, and he would **meet Heather** in those years. Jeremy would go on to the **University of Kansas**—rock, chalk, Jayhawks (did I get that right?)—and receive his **degree in architectural engineering**. After graduating, he would work for **Eby Construction** and move to **Wichita, KS**. Jeremy would move up the ranks in short order, from field engineer to project engineer to project manager to superintendent; he was that good. In 1998, he would **marry Heather**, with whom he would spend the next 18 years. In due course, they would grow their family with the **births of Riley and Jackson**. In 2006, they would move to **Elkins, Arkansas**, where Jeremy would fall in love with the Ozark National Forest, as well as Ozark culture and folklore.

2009 brought Jeremy and Heather, Riley and Jackson to **Boone**. The **mountains called to them, especially to Jeremy**, as they do to so many of us, and they made their home here.

Jeremy had long **loved bluegrass**, and well, that puts you just about in heaven here where that music lives and breathes for real. I think Jeremy is most pleased with the musical selections today. Jeremy would immerse himself in the life of the community, both here at **St. Luke's** and in the **Boone Football Association**, where he served as an official, a trainer, and a rule book expert—he LOVED being a referee.

Jeremy **fell in love with Appalachia**—all of it—the culture, the music, the people, the stunning beauty of this place. He loved to be **out on the trail** hiking or backpacking, and he loved to introduce others to these mountains he called home.

In these years, both in Arkansas and in Boone, Jeremy took one of those roads less traveled, at least at that time, and was a **stay-at-home dad**, but he and the kids didn't just stay-at-home. He would **bequeath to them his love of nature**, and Riley and Jackson, that inheritance is yours forever. He was the consummate **dance-dad, lego-builder**, and he introduced his kids to the **finer art of watching football**, specifically the **Kansas City Chiefs**, and **college basketball**, specifically the **Kansas Jayhawks**, with the passion that is only proper when the game is on the line. Being a KY fan, let it be known that Jeremy and I had extended conversations in this regard.

**Riley and Jackson, Jeremy loved being a dad and he loved being your dad; he was so proud of you both.**

Jeremy had a **ton of love in his heart**, and he wove his way into ours. He was a **good friend, loyal and steadfast**. He quite naturally **gathered people together**. He'd **do anything for someone in need**. He was **caring**, and he was kind, and he always **pulled for the underdog**. He **loved to serve**—I got to see this part of him up close.

Shortly after moving to Boone, Jeremy and Heather and Riley and Jackson found their way to **St. Luke's**. Jeremy **loved the Episcopal Church**; it was in his blood. And it wasn't too long before he served on our **Vestry**. He would become our **Jr. Warden** with oversight of our building and grounds, and he was one of our all-time best Jr. Wardens. He could spot a problem, see a solution, fix anything, rally folks to a project, actually get it done, and have everyone having a good time in the process.

In 2014, he would serve as **Sr. Warden**. In our church, that's the **Rector's confidant, my most trusted lay leader**. He **listened well**; he always **told me the truth**; and he gave me **wise counsel** more times than I could count. He'd managed a lot of folks in his work, and he was great as I puzzled through **complex people dynamics**. It was Jeremy who would **hold down the fort while I was on sabbatical** that summer, and it was Jeremy who **encouraged me when I wanted to pursue a Brené Brown training**, and when I mentioned Brené Brown in countless sermons afterwards, it was Jeremy who would sit in the second to last row and do an **air tally mark** every time I said her name. He had a way of **keeping my feet firmly planted on the ground**. Every leader needs someone like that around. He **went toe-to-toe with me**, and I was the better for it. **Jeremy loved this St. Luke's community**, and we were all the better for it.

These last years were hard for Jeremy. **Mental illness** and **substance abuse** would take a toll on him. **These are illnesses**, not moral choices, not matters of the will; these are **illnesses of the body, the mind, the heart, and the spirit**. They are illnesses many of us in this room live with, and if not us, then someone we love. Let there be no shame about this.

In 2021, he moved to **Williamson County, IL**. He was determined to make a new start, and he used his gifts and set about to completely **renovate a property**. He would **reconnect with some old friends**.

He had **times of doing better**, and then the **darkness would descend again**. We will probably never know exactly what happened on that last day, but we do know this, **his death is tragic in every way**.

It is hard to square the **gifted, full of life, full of love person we knew** with how **these illnesses manifested in him**. *But none of us can be reduced to our illnesses, our struggles, our brokenness—we are always more than these.* Before, beneath, beyond all of these, Jeremy was a beloved son of God, made in God's image, precious in God's sight; Jeremy was marked as Christ's own forever. *God has had God's hands on Jeremy from his first breath, and God had him as he took his last. No illness can take that away, ever.*

The Lord who was Jeremy's shepherd has never left his side. Whether **passing through green pastures on his way up and down mountains, literally and figuratively**, whether **resting beside still waters or in the throes of wild ones, even as Jeremy walked through the valley of the shadow of death**, God was there with him, rod and staff in hand to comfort him, dwelling place prepared for him, open arms to welcome him. The peace Jeremy long sought, he now has found. The healing he yearned for now is his.

One of the **most tragic things** about the illnesses that afflicted Jeremy is that they **make it hard to see the fierce love that lives inside. HE LOVED YOU ALL.** Whatever was in Jeremy's way these last years that **made it hard for his sensitive soul to thrive in this world of hard edges,** whatever **made it hard for all that love that lived in him to flow in and out as easily as it once had,** whatever was **in his way of loving fully and completely and receiving fully and completely all the love that so many people had for him,** whatever was in the way, **THAT IS DONE AWAY WITH NOW.**

**ALL THAT IS LEFT IS HIS WIDE-OPEN HEART SET FREE TO LOVE AND BE LOVED FULLY AND COMPLETELY WITH ABANDON.** How do we know this? Because **Jesus** told us: **I go to prepare a place for you...And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. Jesus has welcomed Jeremy into the fullness of that radiant love that is boundless and unencumbered and simply flows.**

Jeremy has crossed the threshold, and in whatever ways he needed, *he has been made whole.* His beautiful, sensitive, soul lives on, and his spirit will be seeking us out. He'll find us on the trail when the beauty takes our breath away. He'll dance amongst the harmonies of a bluegrass tune. He'll be hanging around when you gather with friends, especially if a campfire is involved. He'll show up when your tackling a project that has you stumped. He'll be right smack in the middle of a fierce ballgame *or* chess match. And when you least expect it, his great big heart will make itself known and bid us to *pay that love forward.*

That is Jeremy's inheritance *to us*—to love fiercely, to live passionately, and to never take this precious life for granted. In doing these things, **not only will his life continue to live in us, but through us, his love will continue to bless this world.** Amen.

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