

# Daily View

*“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13*

June 11, 2020



The church building at Huntington Beach – lots of memories here. My dad preached here in 1955-58 and 1963-66 and I preached here in 1988-1994.

## Friends for life...and death

I'm thinking of Jeff Canavello today. Jeff was my best friend while I was preaching at the Surf City church of Christ, where most of the hymns were set to the tunes of the Beach Boys' songs (just kidding, it was Jan & Dean...OK, not really. It was the *Huntington Beach* church and we sang out of one of the approved song books).

The entire Canavello clan is special to us. Don and Jean, Jeff's parents, were (and are) dear friends. For 6 ½ years, we spent countless hours with them. They were our “parents away from home.”

We got to know their daughter, Jennifer Strutz, who was living elsewhere at the time. I'm not sure I've ever met anyone more excited about Christ than Jennifer. Her husband, Ray, is a dedicated Christian and leader in the church with a — let's just say “*unique*” — sense of humor.

Jeff and I became fast friends, but we got off to a rocky start. One Wednesday night, shortly after I arrived there in 1988, I was teaching a class. I don't know what I said, but Jeff raised his hand and said — dramatically — “*I don't agree with that at all.*” Nothing in my experience with preachers in my past or in my short stint as a full-time preacher led me to believe that you could actually disagree with a preacher, especially out loud, in public. I said to myself, “he can't do that; I'm the preacher!” But he did “do that,” and it was humbling.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy. *Proverbs 27:6*

To make matters more difficult, I learned that Jeff had a Masters in speech. I didn't. I didn't even have my Kindergarten degree in speech. In college, I dropped out of three speech classes before they even started, due to fear. I have no business being a preacher, if it requires a degree... or even a speech class.

After I learned this about Jeff, I was preaching one Sunday and for almost the entire sermon, he was frowning. His furrowed brow caught my attention and his head seemed to get bigger and bigger as I continued to talk. I was asking myself, “what, on earth, did I say that is causing Jeff to frown like that?” After services, I asked him about it and he said... “Oh, I was just concentrating...I didn't disagree with anything.” Great, now you tell me.

Jeff and I had some of the most interesting discussions I've ever had, before or since. Jeff was always challenging the status quo, always asking questions. He took nothing for granted. He demanded proof, not pat answers. He was good for me.

The heart is delighted by the fragrance of oil and sweet perfumes, and in just the same way, the soul is sweetened by the wise counsel of a friend. *Proverbs 27:9, The Voice*

I taught classes in Romans twice while at Huntington Beach. Jeff and I discussed the text in depth, almost every week at lunch or at one of our homes. I was surprised when this young successful businessman, who could come off as brash and even cocky, admitted that he struggled with confidence in his spiritual life at times. Like many others, he worried that he did not do enough, know enough, and wasn't good enough.

Sadly, toward the end of my tenure at Huntington Beach, Jeff was stricken with cancer at the age of 42. It started as melanoma but finally invaded his whole body. Christie and I had since moved up here, but we made the trip twice to Orange County to see Jeff. The last time we were there, shortly before his death, Jeff's voice was not strong. He motioned to me to come closer. He whispered in a broken voice, “*thank you... thank you... thank you for teaching Romans...*”

Jeff died a few days after we left. That is one reason the book of Romans is so dear to me.