

Tribute to Rev. Dr. I. Judson Levy

by Rev. John E. Boyd

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Vincent Rushton Memorial Luncheon
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It is with a sense of pleasure and honour that I offer a tribute to one of the founding members of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, the Reverend Doctor Isaac Judson Levy.

In preparing this tribute I am indebted to the wonderful volume, *Chaplain Extraordinary*, edited by Dr. J. R. C. Perkin, which was published by Lancelot Press as a tribute to Jud at the time of his retirement in 1975. It includes articles by a number of Jud's colleagues and friends as well as a sampling of his Chapel talks and sermons from his years as Chaplain here at Acadia.

Jud was born in Sherwood, Lunenburg County, on July 15, 1907, one of six sons of Edward and Ella Levy. The 1911 Census records their names with the spelling "Levey" although Jud never used that - in fact, he may not have known it!

The remarkable story of the Levy clan from Sherwood would fill several volumes as each of Jud's brothers made their own tremendous contributions in the fields of theology, law, education, resource management and farming. There were times when the little, one-room

school in the community had only members of the clan attending, and it was the pattern that each of the older boys, in turn, would teach their younger brothers.

Sometime around 1923, when he would have been about 16, Jud took a summer course at the Normal College in Truro and began a four year teaching career. In 1927, he entered Acadia to begin studies for the ministry, receiving a B.A. in Theology in 1931. He was elected life-President of his class and I remember how seriously he took that responsibility when I knew him some forty years later.

Jud once told me the story of one of his first, if not his first, serious preaching engagement. It took place in the little Union Church that used to be in Upper Cornwall, Lunenburg County, a Church for which I was their last pastor. Being Jud, he worked diligently on this sermon and then delivered it with all the passion he could muster. When he finished, he told me: “A sense of panic came over me. I had put everything I knew and everything I believed in that one sermon and now I wondered if I would ever have anything more to say!”

Jud certainly did have more to say! After graduating from Acadia, he went to work for the Maritime Religious Education Council, an ecumenical organization dedicated to the ministry of religious education and supported by Baptist, United, Presbyterian and Disciple bodies.

According to M. Allen Gibson (“Ministry Among Boys” in *Chaplain Extraordinary*), as Boys Work Secretary, Jud went from county to county

setting up model parliaments where the boys learned the rudiments of democratic debate and an understanding of our democratic structures. Once a year there would be a Maritime Model Parliament and boys would be brought from all over the region to either Acadia University, Mount Allison University or Pine Hill Divinity Hall (now Atlantic School of Theology) for a weekend of hands on parliamentary activity.

Over the four years of his stewardship, hundreds of boys learned public speaking, debating, the art of compromise and the effectiveness of proper procedure, especially when dealing with controversial subjects. They learned how to meet new people, face new ideas and form coalitions for action. They discovered that there was a connection between freedom and responsibility and between faith and community service.

All this would be followed up with the summer camping programs at Wegesequm near Chipman, NB and at Pinehurst in Lunenburg County, NS. For decades, clergy in pulpits of various denominations could trace their call to ministry to one of these experiences. Gibson writes (1975):

More than 40 years have passed but it is not difficult to visualize the scene as though it was but yesterday. Even now, the remembrance is of the scent of pine in the air and of the soft breath of the wind sounding through the upper branches. As the tide of memory comes to the flood, one sees him standing there, a Bible open in his hand and the

word of the Lord upon his lips - Jud Levy, speaking to the very hearts of boys, locating and shaping talents for Christ.

In 1935 Jud entered B. D. studies at Andover Newton Theological School near Boston, intending to complete the degree in two years. However, after the first year, he accepted the call of the Sussex, NB United Baptist Church and entered into his career as a pastor. It was while there that he met and, on August 5, 1939, married Fernetta Geraldine Barchard of Elgin, NB, a partnership in ministry that had a huge impact on thousands of lives, especially young lives, in the decades that followed.

In 1940 Jud and Ferne moved to Charlottetown to serve the First Baptist Church and years later I would meet people whose lives were transformed while in their youth by the ministry of preaching and leadership they experienced under Jud. He was able to take a year's leave of absence (1943-44) to return to Andover Newton and complete his BD. One can only imagine the challenges involved during those wartime years!

From 1947-1955 Jud ministered to the congregation of First Baptist Church, Moncton, NB. Once again his ministry focussed on youth and young couples. He told me once of his great disappointment that he could not convince the Moncton Church to build a new Christian Education wing, as needed as it was. As it turned out, the CE wing would be built during the ministry of his successor, Dr. Abner J. Langley. Typical of Jud as he told me this story, he looked me in the eye and said, "Don't expect to get credit

for all your ideas, John. Sometimes you plant the seed and someone else brings in the harvest. Just thank God for giving you something to plant!”

It was while Jud was in Moncton that he again returned to Andover Newton, this time to earn a Masters in Sacred Theology in 1951. It was also while in Moncton that Jud penned the little booklet, *The Christian and the Church*, in whose pages I first met him as I was being prepared for Church membership. It has been reprinted many times.

From Moncton he would go on to Queen Street Baptist Church in St. Catherines, ON and later to James St. Baptist Church in Hamilton, ON. During those years he was the Baptist representative to the Canadian Council of Churches, chairing its Religious Education Committee for six years. He also formally and informally supervised and was a trusted mentor for student ministers, like Mel Hillmer and Bruce Neal.

In 1964 Jud and Ferne and their daughter Lynn moved to Wolfville as he became University Chaplain for Acadia, the role through which many of us came to know and love him, and through which he immeasurably impacted our lives.

By this time, the themes of his ministry were clear: dignified worship, excellent preaching, deep pastoral and personal concern for youth, ecumenism and scholarship.

During his eleven years as Chaplain, Jud regularly conducted ten weekday Chapel Services, each lasting almost exactly fifteen minutes, and an hour long Sunday evening service each week of term. The daily services

were absolute gems and any of us who experienced them have rich memories of a man who could with a word, a gesture, a prayer, a choice of hymn take us directly into what Marcus Borg calls a “thin place” where we could meet God.

It only took Jud a few words to capture your interest, but we knew that those few words had been prepared through long, painstaking study. We knew that the integrity that marked his words was also found in his character. We knew that the man we listened to in worship was the same man who would listen to us in the confidentiality of his study, and of his friendship. We learned that authentic Christian experience was not partisan or sectarian or dependent upon what James A. Sanders (a wonderful scholar Jud brought to campus in 1970) called *denominationalism*!

It is interesting to me that two of Jud’s most lasting contributions to the religious life of the Maritimes occurred in those last few years before his retirement.

One was the founding of the Atlantic Seminar in Theological Education in 1969. Jud, along with the Chaplains at Dalhousie University, the University of Kings College, the University of New Brunswick, St. Dunstan’s University (now the University of Prince Edward Island), Mount Allison University and the Nova Scotia Agricultural College, saw a huge need in the lives of many pastors of all denominations - continuing theological education. Together they successfully applied for a Rockefeller grant and thus began a series of annual ecumenical seminars in theology,

ministry and Christian practice that continues to this day. In fact, the 44th Seminar, which has been self-sufficient for many years and now includes both laity and clergy, will open on June 10th with Bill Blaikie, Ched Myers and Russell Daye as speakers!

The other was the founding of the Atlantic Baptist Fellowship, an organization Jud nurtured with as much love and attention as he gave to his famous rose gardens! When the Convention voted in 1971 to turn its back on decades of fruitful ecumenical participation by pulling out of the Canadian Council of Churches, and compounded this narrowing of Baptist vision by violating local church autonomy, suddenly making immersion a criterion for being a delegate no matter what a congregation decided, Jud Levy was in the thick of the meetings and decisions that led to the emergence of the ABF. When he agreed to edit the *Bulletin* we became the happy recipients of his wisdom and passion. He mined the ecumenical world for stories we would not otherwise hear. He connected us to Baptist colleagues of like mind in other parts of North America. He cogently interpreted and commented on the activities of our Churches and of the Convention. And as wonderful as all that was, the best was yet to come in every edition - the back page! I treasure those gems of reflection and prophetic comment!

In retirement, Jud penned two fine volumes on subjects that revealed his pastoral heart. *Come, Let Us Worship* and *Teach Us to Pray* are filled with the wit and wisdom of a great pastor. I read them again as I prepared

this talk and I was struck by how each word and phrase was chosen to address the questions, hopes and doubts he had heard in countless encounters with the people he loved.

Jud`s final years were difficult as the onset of Parkinson`s Disease robbed him of so much of what meant the most to him - reading, writing, gardening, walks, even conversation. When death came at the age of 85 on October 16, 1992, he was ready to move on.

Like Allen Gibson in 1975, I, too, can look back forty plus years as if they were but yesterday and in my mind`s eye see Jud step quietly, yet purposefully into the Chancel of the Acadia Chapel at 9:25 on a week day morning to lead 125 students in worship. I can hear Eugen F. Gmeiner on the organ, improvising on what would become the opening hymn (“The God of Abraham Praise”), chosen by this man who loved music but could not sing a note (he often looked as if he were in deep pain while the rest of us sang to the top of our lungs). Why were we there? It was not because we *had* to be, let me assure you! And yet, in a strange way, it *was* because we just had to *be* there - we had discovered that those few moments in worship, led by one who had come prepared in every sense of the word, could take us to a place of such deep holiness, grace and meaning that we could begin to make sense of the challenges and opportunities we were sure to face in the day ahead. Listen now to what we heard - (Read “This New Day” from Levy, I. Judson. This New Day. Windsor, NS: Lancelot Press, 1972).

THIS NEW DAY

Well, it has happened again! We have been given a new day! You do not seem to be surprised — nor am I. Surely we expected it. We take it for granted. Perhaps we should not. If we did not so take it for granted, we might be more conscious of what it means.

A few hours ago we witnessed the end of another day. This too was quite as expected if we thought about it at all, which we probably did not. But it ended just the same. Darkness settled over the land with a sense of finality. The end of that day found us with many things not done, even some things that we had planned on doing, and, quite likely, many that we did not even come to our minds. What if that day had been the last day? . . . It was for some!

What if that day had been the last day — really? If something had gone wrong with the mechanism of the universe — if the glow had not appeared in the Eastern sky just when it was supposed to — if the darkness had not receded! If — how absurd! Yes! but if it hadn't, what could we have done about it? Just nothing! But it has happened again. It is day again! — "the day that the Lord has made" — not that we made! It is God's gift to us. That is the first thing we should note at the beginning of this new day, and so begin on a note of thanksgiving to God.

This new day! — Now that it is here, what are we going to do with it? "This is the day" — the day, for what? Well, that depends pretty much on how you regard life itself. You have some plan and purpose in life? — then this is the day to work at it. Much as we wish, no one can bring back yesterday, or guarantee tomorrow. Today is ours — and only today. Note further that it is ours only while it is today — and then it will be gone like yesterday and all the other yesterdays.

This is the day! — You dream of a life of love and service to others, of being really helpful in the world's struggle against pain and evil — then, this is the day to do that! You

dream of being something, some kind of person, then, this is the day to be that kind of person. It is your ambition to walk through life, touching wounded lives – speaking a word of hope and encouragement to the disheartened – being a friend to some lonely person – living in life's ordinary contacts a life like Jesus lived – or, of facing up to the problems in your own life – of seeking forgiveness for some wrong you have done – of making a commitment of yourself to something high and worthwhile – THEN , THIS IS THE DAY – THE DAY THAT GOD HAS GIVEN FOR THAT VERY PURPOSE. This day is a unique opportunity that never occurred before, and will never occur again. That makes this day seem pretty important, doesn't it? It is just that important.

All you dream of doing and being, if it happens at all, will come to pass one day, on some today – not on a yesterday of regret or a tomorrow of hope, but today.

“This is the day which the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” Why not? God gave us this day for pure enjoyment, as well as for our use. Enjoy today! Do not be so busy travelling toward some distant scene of beauty that you do not see the beauty in the landscape as you pass. Do not dissipate all your present energies working toward a joy that you hope to have some day, and, while planning, miss the joys of today. There are opportunities for joy this day that will never come again. Rejoice and be glad this day – this very day!