

What a Way to Go

Ruth Bell Graham's body rests in a plywood coffin handmade by a murderer. Her famous husband will eventually lie in another. The carpenter's corpse has already been buried in one of his own creations as well.

Richard Liggett murdered a man in New Orleans and wound up doing life in Angola where he worked crafting coffins for fellow inmates and where he contracted cancer and where he found Christ. Franklin Graham, whose ministry funds a Bible college on death row, saw a sample of Liggett's work on a recent visit and, struck by their simplicity, recommended them to his parents. The con-cum-craftsman knew he was a coffin-er to Christian royalty and considered the task an honor.

At the same time he built boxes for the first couple of American evangelicalism, Liggett hammered out his own. He told the warden, "I'm sick. I don't know which one will be for me, but I'm rubbing 'em all really good."

I can't help but ponder the parallels this story suggests.

"And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death." – Isaiah 53.9. Like her Lord, Ruth Bell Graham made her grave with the wicked: Rome destined Jesus' body for the common grave of criminals, and Mrs. Graham's corpse now shares its cell with convicts. Like his Lord, Richard Liggett is with the rich in his death: two of the faith's most respected saints will unashamedly bunk in his accommodations. Like their Lord, neither Liggett nor the Grahams would buy into a lot of nonsense about a "final resting place": Jesus only needed the tomb temporarily until he kicked off the resurrection, and these saints know their bodies await its full harvest.

Like his Lord, Richard Liggett was a carpenter. Liggett crafted his own coffin, and Jesus built his own cross. He built it with his dreadnought determination to speak truth to power and his case-hardened commitment to humanity's redemption. Richard Liggett died a convicted murderer; Jesus hung on a murderer's cross. Jesus died for Richard Liggett, and Richard Liggett lived for Jesus.

Ruth Bell Graham never murdered anybody. She lived an exemplary life of Christian piety and service. And Ruth Bell Graham would have been the first to tell you that Romans 3.23 included her as well as the toughest con in Angola, that she deserved a murderer's coffin because she deserved a

murder's cross, and that Richard Liggett's conversion was no more a miracle than her own.

Rest in peace, my brother and sister, but know you are only resting. On the day the trumpet sounds the murdered and risen Christ will call those who murdered him to rise to eternal life. Our final home is not a coffin made with hands, but a city made without them, a place where our crimes and, perhaps better still, our good deeds, fade to invisibility in the blinding light of God's unfiltered love.

Resurgam!
Doug