Remembering the Life of

Joel Belz

1941 – 2024
Please silence your cell phone.

Following the service, you are invited to attend the burial at Mountain View Memorial Park, 392 Tabernacle Road, Black Mountain.

For their support and kindness, the family thanks the Anders-Rice Funeral Home, Arden Presbyterian Church, Great Commission Publications, and loved ones at Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church and World News Group. Thank you to ministers, musicians, and church staff.

Doreen Kellogg created the banner draped on the casket. Matt Barker designed this program.

The hymns sung at the memorial service and at the graveside are among Joel’s 40 favorites, and he got to hear the short version of the homily just before he went to glory.

_Hymns from Trinity Hymnal_  
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Call to Worship:

Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.” —Job 1:20-21

Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.” —John 11:25-26a

Invocation

We praise God:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

We invoke His presence:

Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Remembrances – Rev. Render Caines

Scripture Readings:

Psalm 130
Romans 8:31-39

We sing of our Savior:

None Other Lamb, None Other Name
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

Homily – Isaiah 52:7 – Rev. Sean McCann

We conclude our worship:

How Firm a Foundation

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20

The Blessing
Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Ps. 103:1, 2

1. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
O my soul, praise him, for he is thy health and salvation! All ye who hear, now to his temple draw near, join me in glad adoration.

2. Praise to the Lord, who o’er all things so wondrously reigneth, sheltering thee under his wings, yea, so sires e’er have been granted in what he ordained? mighty will do, if with his love he befriend thee.

3. Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and de- made thee, decked thee with health, and with loving hand dore him! All that hath life and breath, come now with day attend thee; ponder anew what the Almighty hath prais’d before him! Let the amen sound from his

4. Praise to the Lord, who with marvelous wisdom hath made thee, decked thee with health, and with loving hand dore him! All that hath life and breath, come now with

5. Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me a- a- tion! O my soul, praise him, for he is thy reigneth, sheltering thee under his wings, yea, so sires e’er have been granted in what he ordained? mighty will do, if with his love he befriend thee.

• Praise to the Lord, who o’er all things so wondrously reigneth, sheltering thee under his wings, yea, so sires e’er have been granted in what he ordained? mighty will do, if with his love he befriend thee.

• Praise to the Lord, who doth prosper thy work and de- made thee, decked thee with health, and with loving hand dore him! All that hath life and breath, come now with

• Praise to the Lord! O let all that is in me ad-
Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

Samuel... named it Ebenezer, saying, "Thus far has the Lord helped us." 1 Sam. 7:12

1. Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
2. Here I raise my Ebenezer; hither by thy help I'm come;
3. O to grace how great a debt—daily I'm constrained to be;

streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise.
and I hope, by thy good pleasure, safely to arrive at home.
let that grace now, like a fetter, bind my wand'ring heart to thee.

Teach me some melodious sonnet, sung by flaming tongues above;
Jesus sought me when a stranger, wand'ring from the fold of God:
Prone to wander—Lord, I feel it—prone to leave the God I love:

praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it, mount of God's unchanging love.
his, to rescue me from danger, interposed his precious blood.
here's my heart, O take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.
None Other Lamb, None Other Name

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.
Ps. 73:25

1. None other Lamb, none other name, none other
   hope in heav’n or earth or sea, none other

2. My faith burns low, my hope burns low; only my
   heart’s desire cries out in me by the deep

3. Lord, thou art Life, though I be dead; love’s fire thou
   art, however cold I be: nor heav’n have

hid - ing place from guilt and shame, none be - side thee!
thun - der of its want and woe, cries out to thee.

1. nor place to lay my head, nor home, but thee.
Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me

That rock was Christ. 1 Cor. 10:4

1. Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee; let the water and the blood, from thy river's demands, could my zeal no respite know, could my tears for cross I cling; naked, come to thee for dress; helpless, look to close in death, when I soar to worlds unknown, see thee on thy side which flowed, be of sin the double cure, cleanse me from its ever flow, all for sin could not atone; thou must save, and thee for grace; soul, I to the Fountain fly; wash me, Savior, judgment throne. Rock of Ages, cleft for me, let me hide my guilt and pow'r. thou alone.
or I die.
sel in thee.


How Firm a Foundation

*1. How firm a foundation, you saints of the Lord, is laid for your faith in his excellent Word! What more can he say than to God, and will still give you aid; I'll strengthen you, help you, and sorrow shall not overflow; for I will be with you, your sufficient, shall be your supply; the flame shall not hurt you; I

*2. “Fear not, I am with you, O be not dismayed; for I am your cause you to stand, upheld by my righteous, omnipotent hand. troubles to bless, and sanctify to you your deepest distress. only design your dross to consume and your gold to refine.

*3. When through the deep waters I call you to go, the rivers of you he has said, to you who for refuge to Jesus have fled? my sovereign, eternal, unchangeable love; and when hoary hairs shall their temples adorn, like lambs they shall still in my bosom be borne.

*4. “When through fiery trials your pathway shall lie, my grace, all-sufficient, shall be your supply; the flame shall not hurt you; I

*5. “E’en down to old age all my people shall prove

*6. “The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,

I will not, I will not desert to his foes;
that soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
I’ll never, no never, no never forsake.”
In 2014, Joel wrote to his five daughters, “Let me give proper tribute to Mom, here where all of you can note it: she is a stalwart…and she doesn’t miss a beat. I love her!”

Joel’s life required a stalwart companion. He was a man of enterprise and vision. He was a builder, a founder, an educator, a writer, a father of five and friend to hundreds. He possessed an endless wonder at the world, its workings, and its people.

Most important, his life’s goal was to share—with children and with adults alike—his awe of the creator of that world, and the love of his savior Jesus.

Joel Belz was born in Marshalltown, Iowa, to Max Victor Belz and Jean Franzenburg Belz. He was the second of eight children. In the 1940s, Max and Jean were among the founders of the Bible Presbyterian Church of Cono Center and Cono Christian School near Walker, Iowa.

In addition to their work as pastor and teacher, Max and Jean ran a print shop from their home. The printing business was a family endeavor; Joel had learned to operate a Linotype by the time he was 11 years old. His experience with the complex machine left him with a lifelong fascination with human invention in general,
and with printing in particular.

Joel graduated as valedictorian of his senior class at Cono. He was quick, with modesty, also to honor the salutatorian—the only other member of his graduating class.

Joel attended the fledgling Covenant College, then located in St. Louis, Mo. In 1963, he scouted a new location for the college: the Lookout Mountain Hotel in Georgia, built in 1928 but standing then unused and abandoned. For three months during the following spring, Joel lived alone in the empty hotel, taking the measure both of the property and of local support for the planned relocation of a college at the place.

After Covenant College moved to Lookout Mountain, Joel worked there in public relations and as an instructor. He met and married a Covenant alumna, Diana Ewing. The couple moved temporarily so that Joel could complete his graduate work at the University of Iowa.

Although his master’s degree was in mass communications, the pursuit of Joel’s life was to connect individuals. He was forward-thinking in his use of technology, providing resources for students and teachers in cash-strapped Christian schools.

After returning south, Joel helped found Lookout Mountain Christian School. On the wooded property behind the Reformed Presbyterian
Church, he joined a small team in building a facility to house the new school. Now with two daughters, he also began building a house near the school, in the shape of a geodesic dome. He served as a ruling elder at the church.

Joel’s marriage to Diana ended in divorce. In the following years, he continued working at Covenant College, operated a small print shop, and served as headmaster of LMCS. Upperclass students at the school were part of the Cono Educational Network, a precursor to distance learning that connected teachers across time zones with students in several schools.

In his role as headmaster at LMCS, Joel actively recruited Black students from the city of Chattanooga, increasing their number to about one-third of the school’s small student body. The school later moved downtown to Broad Street, better to serve the city. Today, Chattanooga Christian School enrolls 1,400 students.

In 1975, Joel married Carol Esther Jackson—also a graduate of Covenant. For two years, while living in the dome and caring for two preschoolers and a newborn, they worked toward completing construction on the house.

Joel was hired in 1977 as managing editor of The Presbyterian Journal, and the family moved to Asheville, N.C. For 35 years, the Journal had chronicled the history of Presbyterian denominations in the United States and had taken a stance resisting the liberal theological drift of the mainline churches.

Joel and Carol Esther were founding members of Covenant Reformed Presbyterian Church in Asheville. By 1979, they were the parents of five daughters, all of whom would attend Asheville Christian Academy, then located a short distance from their home in Haw Creek. Joel served for many years on the ACA board, and he rejoiced to see it grow into an institution that serves 800 students today.
In the 1970s and 80s, with a press in his own basement, Joel ran a print shop called Perspective Press. He wrote and printed publications including Mandate, a denominational newspaper, and Bulletin News Supplement, a bulletin insert that relayed news from local churches across the nation.

In 1982, the Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod joined the Presbyterian Church in America. For the next 40 years, Joel and Carol Esther served faithfully in their local PCA church and in the larger denomination. In 2003, Joel was elected moderator of the General Assembly of the PCA. He remained deeply involved also with Covenant College, serving on its board over a span of 38 years.

The Presbyterian Journal was succeeded in 1987 by WORLD, a news magazine committed, as Joel described it, to “sound reporting on how God is at work in the world.” WORLD had itself grown from a popular line of children’s papers, which Joel had pioneered six years earlier. At that time, he had envisioned a news magazine for school children, akin to The Weekly Reader but with reporting from a Christian point of view. The earliest edition, taking its name from Psalm 24:1, was called It’s God’s World.

Life at home was no less busy than at the office. Joel and Carol were back in the construction business in 1993, remodeling their Haw Creek home to create space for larger groups to gather, in the living room, on the porch, and in the kitchen.
Carol Esther kept a frugal home—gardening, canning, sewing, hanging clothes to dry. To make ends meet, she worked a succession of part-time jobs, assisting at ACA and at Joel’s office. Joel was a handyman at home, determined, skilled, always seeking improvement—with varying degrees of success. He cut the lawn with his riding mower, and delighted in pulling grandchildren in a trailer behind him.

Guests were a welcome constant—whether staying over from out of town, or visiting
for Sunday dinner after church. Sunday nights were Joel’s time in the kitchen, as he prepared pot after pot of popcorn, to be shaken in paper grocery bags with salt and butter, and served with milk or Coca-Cola. Joel and Carol always ate their popcorn with a spoon out of a glass of milk, a practice dating back to Joel’s youth in Iowa. Those nights were filled with story-telling, hymn-singing, and talk of the week past and the one ahead.

In 2011, Joel and Carol Esther moved Bill and Freda Belle Jackson to their home in Asheville. They were loving caregivers of Carol’s parents through their deaths in 2013 and 2016.

Joel wrote more than once of his gratitude for the “sturdy women” in his life—including his mother, his aunts, his sisters, his wife, and his daughters. He had non-traditional expectations of his family. In addition to the typical instruction in bicycle-riding and stick-shift driving, he passed along to his daughters his knowledge of brick- and stone-laying, demolition and construction, mowing and tilling, plumbing and wiring. Generations of Joel’s family were familiar with the cheerful whistling that accompanied his own labor.

Over the years, World News Group expanded to include a journalism institute, a daily podcast, websites to accompany the newspapers, and a video current events program. Up through his final year, Joel continued writing his editorials for WORLD, and contributing commentary to its radio program.

Joel Belz was always pushing forward, but his roots in reformed Christian faith and practice were sunk deep. For their 49 years together, he and his wife Carol Esther lived and shared with others their confessed belief, “To live is Christ, and to die is gain.” And they bore witness, personally and professionally, to their conviction that:

*The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.*
For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
—Philippians 1:21
The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.

—Psalm 24:1-2