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Minister Emeritus

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THE FIRST CHURCH OF NAZARETH, U.L.C.
St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands

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The following poem came to me August 21, 1994 when I was presiding at the funeral of Rus Hensley. Rus was a professional Marlin Tournament fisherman who had died the previous February as an indirect result of some injuries he had received in a steel mill when he was a young man. He lived most of his adult life in chronic pain, but even so he loved to party. Rus had requested that his ashes be committed to the sea during the VI's annual Boy Scout marlin tournament. We were to go to the North drop where the best fish would be found.

We had done a very successful memorial service at the Sportfishermen's Club in Red Hook. Then, along with 20 or so immediate family and friends, we boarded the *Fun Ticket*, a 70+ foot, 6 story high, Bertram sportfisherman for the 20 mile ride into the Atlantic.

I had struggled over what to say at the actual committal ceremony. His St. Thomas friends had brought along his personal bar stool, to be committed with his ashes (at his request). I was afraid my words might be too serious for the occasion, or perhaps not serious enough for his family.

Just as we left Pillsbury Sound, near Thatch Cay, a man of about 40 with a full beard and salt-and-pepper hair approached me. He appeared to be a crew member from one of the sportfishermen, with denim pants and a logo t-shirt. He told me he had a poem he wanted to read at the memorial service, but he had been too overcome to do so. He asked if I had any use for such a thing, and handed me a newspaper clipping with nothing on it but the poem.

I was delighted! The poem seemed to me, to capture the peculiar combination of emotions we feel around the death of a loved one. On one hand we are consumed with loss, but on the other hand we sometimes hope and believe that death is a relief to the afflicted. The result is a wave of sadness mixed with relief and hope. *I Am Free* captures this quality and encourages us to allow an end to our relationship with the living loved one and to begin the process of fond memory.

I read the poem, Rus's family and friends loved it. They wanted to thank the man who gave it to me. But when we looked through the boat from stem to stern, we couldn't find him.

DREW R.E. WALLEN

I AM FREE

*Don't grieve for me, for now I'm free,
I'm following the path God laid for me.
I took God's hand when I heard the call,
I turned my back and left it all.*

*I could not stay another day,
To laugh, to love, to work or play;
Tasks left undone must stay that way,
I found that peace at the close of day.*

*If my parting has left a void,
Then fill it with remembered joy;
A friendship shared, a laugh, a kiss,
Ah, yes, these things I too will miss.*

*Be not burdened with times of sorrow,
I wish you the sunshine of tomorrow,
My life's been full, I savored much;
Good friends, good times, my loved ones' touch.*

*Perhaps my time seemed all too brief,
Don't lengthen it now with undue grief;
God wanted me; now; And set me free.*