

Father's Words at Jacob Kliman-Trimble's Funeral, February 19, 2006
Read by Rabbi Andrew Vogel at Temple Sinai, Brookline, MA

We are grateful for the life of our son Jacob. His life has been a blessing for us and for the many people whom he touched.

Jacob was handed to us by his birth mother in his second day of life. From the beginning, he showed amazing abilities to feel and share joy, to be fascinated by the world around him, to love, and to care deeply about respecting other people - abilities that are so familiar to those of you here who remember him. Jacob loved excitement, and he hated to be bored.

Those of you who remember Jacob from his early years at Pierce School know that he was sunny most of the time, except when school work confronted him with his difficulties with learning. Then, he would struggle against feelings of shame, often using his quick intelligence to find ways to avoid learning challenges. As he entered his teenage years, however, Jacob had more and more difficulty handling his moods and his feelings of shame and anger. He had the ability to rise above these difficulties, as witnessed at his Bar Mitzvah here in this sanctuary, where he blessed us all with his generosity, his moral passion, and his deep and thoughtful reasoning about his Torah portion.

Jacob's teenage years were marked by ever deeper and more destructive involvement with substance abuse. Jacob thought that he had found in alcohol and drugs a way to soothe his pain and deal with his moods. His difficulties with school became more and more intolerable to him. When he was seventeen, his birth mother reached out to hasten the reunion both had dreamed of throughout his life. She had known that he would seek her out when he was ready, but she decided to make the first move because she knew that she was dying. She died days before the day that we had arranged for Jacob to meet her. Jacob responded to this pain with more substance abuse, placing himself in greater and greater danger, and withdrawing more and more from productive activity and loving engagement with others. We came, finally, to the painful decision to tell him that we could not continue to provide him with food and shelter as long as he was acting to destroy his life. For months, we did not know whether or not he would choose life. Finally, as his friends were graduating from the High School from which Jacob had dropped out, he made the decision to go into detox, from there into a rehabilitation program, and from there to Heartland Christian ministries, a life recovery program in which Jacob was able to stay sober, to learn how to work hard, and to discover his remarkable mechanical abilities. Working as a diesel mechanic at Heartland, Jacob discovered a joy of learning and enormous pride at his emerging talent. He returned to us seven months sober, determined to make a life for himself. He planned to get a Brookline High School Diploma, go to college for certification as a diesel or automobile repair technician, and build a life doing what he loved and what he knew he was good at doing. He had found a deep faith in God that helped him to resist his cravings for substance use, and to hold and sustain him through moments of doubt and distress.

The road to recovery is not a straight path, nor a smooth one. In the days before his death, Jacob struggled with the realities of life demands that he had avoided for so many years. The voices of peers urging him to join them in substance use proved at moments to be louder and more compelling than the other voices that Jacob was striving to cultivate within himself. He faltered

and he stumbled. We have no doubt that, had Jacob lived, he would have overcome this setback, restoring his faith and humility, and continuing to set an example by his determination to make a good life for himself.

Here, we want to speak especially to those of you who, like Jacob, sometimes feel that the pain and frustrations of life are more than you can bear. We know that, for young people living in the relative comfort and safety of Brookline, just a few miles from areas of Boston where nearly every young person has had to face death, the possibility that you might actually die seems remote. Even as you feel that life is not worth living, it is hard for you to imagine that your life could actually come to an end, or to imagine the pain that your passing would bring to those around you. We know that Jacob did not get in his car Thursday night intending to die. Knowing Jacob, we believe that he knew that he had made a mistake and that he would have to confront the consequences of that mistake. He was trying to give himself such an intense feeling of excitement in the present that he could have relief from the painful awareness of this setback in his recovery. Because he had stumbled, his judgment and his abilities were fatally impaired by alcohol as he soared in his beloved car on the knife edge of life and death, not fully imagining the reality of the death that awaited him.

We ask that all the young people here help us to extend the blessing of our son's life by making Jacob's life a blessing in your own life. Be inspired by his love of life, of people, and of the world. Treat each other with respect. Have fun, and laugh. Thank Jacob for showing you that, no matter how bad your life may seem to you, it is possible to redeem yourself, to turn yourself around, to discover what it is that you are really good at and what you can do to make the world better for people around you. As you make life-shaping decisions in the future, please remember the pain in your heart as you hear these words now. As hard as it is to believe that you are mortal, that your own acts can bring yourself or your loved ones harm, please remember that Jacob did die. Make your lives a blessing by taking the blessing of Jacob's life into your heart the next time that you are confronted with a decision about whether to get into a car with someone who has been drinking, whether to take just one chance on risky sex, whether to let an argument escalate into physical violence, whether to tempt the law to try to make a fast dollar. If you can hold Jacob in your heart, and honor Jacob by accepting that you are mortal and vulnerable to harm at such moments of decision, you will help us continue to make our son's beautiful life a blessing to the world.