

Some of you may have noticed that Carol and I share the same first name. Our name means “Song of Joy” which I think is a fitting description of the life that she lived. Her smile, her dancing, her concern and care for others were a beautiful reflection of her joyous spirit. Her life shone with the glory of God.

Here’s what I mean by that. When God is glorified, something of God is revealed. The natural world is glorious because it is a reflection of the Creator. Most people say that the place they experience God most fully is in nature. Watching a beautiful sunset or seeing snow covered Mount Baker under a brilliant blue sky stirs our spirits and gives us a sense of the almighty, a sense that there is something more, something greater than ourselves.

We too are a part of that creation, and one of the ways we glorify or reveal God is by loving and caring for each other, just as God loves and cares for each of us. When we love each other, laugh with each other, wipe the forehead of a sick child, or sit quietly and hold the hand of someone who is sad or dying, God is there. God is glorified. God is revealed in those actions, in those expressions of love and compassion.

Carol was a faithful, compassionate person who loved and cared for others throughout her whole life: in her family, in her work and in her ministry. Her love for others was born of her understanding that she was deeply loved by God.

She loved the diversity of people she met in the world through all of her travels and she worked for unity, justice, and peace... respecting the dignity of every human being.

She truly lived these words from Lamentations:

“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.”

I know that Carol began each new morning in prayer. She believed whole-heartedly in the transformative love of God and the power of prayer. She began each new day in gratitude for all she had been given, in thanksgiving for her family, for each of you she loved so much. And she prayed for you, asking God and I think a few of the Saints to protect you, to guide you, to bless you with lives filled with love and hope and peace.

She also practiced Centering Prayer. This is a prayer of sitting quietly and allowing time to simply be with God. One of the most meaningful images that began to define this prayer for her was simply sitting in the lap of an all-loving God and allowing God's love to surround, protect and heal her.

She was a spiritual seeker, who challenged herself to study and learn with an open mind and to put her new insights into practice in her life.

As I think about the pain and suffering she experienced in the last few weeks of her life, I know her faith and prayer comforted her.

²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.

²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.

Celtic Christians believe in the goodness of God and in the goodness of humanity, and that each one of us is created in the image of this goodness by and for God.

They believe we begin our lives in a state of original blessing, not in a state of original sin. Pelagius a 4th century Celtic Christian believed that the image of God can be seen in every newborn child and that, the image of God, although obscured by sin, exists at the heart of every person, waiting to be released through the grace of God. ¹

Seen through this lens, the reason that Jesus was born, lived among us and died for us, was to bring us back home to God and to our true selves, to our core of goodness.

When our lives here on earth are over, our life continues in a new way, as we return home to God. This cycle of birth, life and return is seen as one great unending pattern, all of it connected. This is why the Celtic cross has a circle at its center, to remind us of the regenerative nature of Jesus Christ and our lives in Christ.

Our service begins today with the words I am resurrection and I am life. Instead of seeing the resurrection as saving us from a bad place and taking us to a good place, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is a gift for us that unleashes the power of God's goodness throughout the cycle of our whole lives.

The resurrection is a sign of the complexity of life, it reveals the suffering and death we all experience and at the same time, the powerful force of God's love unleashed in the world to heal that suffering and death.

For Christians, death is not the end of life, but a transition to being with God in a new way, a moment of return to God, coming full circle to return to the place we began.

Resurrection is not meant to be restricted to the moment of our death but is a gift for our whole lives, a gift of everlasting life.

We live through moments and sometimes entire seasons of life that are difficult. Suffering is part of the human condition. In the cross Jesus suffers with us and then rises again to show us that love is more powerful than death and that love never ceases.

Jesus says:

²⁸“Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

This passage acknowledges that life is difficult, that there are times in our lives when we are weary, when we are burdened. God never promises to take away the discomfort, but does promise to be there with us as we suffer and to help us plow the field that will one day bear new life.

The work of grieving a loved one is never easy. It can be heavy, slow and unpredictable. In our gospel reading Jesus promises to share that burden. Not to remove it, but to stand beside us as we plow the earth together.

The last few weeks of Carol's life were painful. I am certain that her steadfast relationship with God was a great comfort to her in her final days. She knew that she was returning home to God.

We will miss her every day, there will be moments of pain and heartache. And God will be with us in each of those moments.

Even though we can see her no longer, Carol will live on in our hearts, in our memories, in our shared stories, through her children, and grandchildren and friends.

In a few moments, we'll come to this communion table to celebrate the gift of resurrection in our lives. In this ritual we remember that through the resurrection of Jesus Christ we become one body, that we are connected forever to one another.

Here, at this table, in the depth of our grief and loss, there is a doorway, there is a thin place where past, present and future touch, where we who are present now are forever united to those who have gone before and those who are yet to come.

My hope for you all is that as Carol lives on through your shared memories of her and as you mourn her loss and celebrate her life, something new will be born among you. I pray that you will discover new depths of meaning in the life you have and an even deeper love for the people who surround you. I think she would want that for you, for all of us.

May the road rise up to meet you.

May the wind be always at your back.

May the sun shine warm upon your face;

the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again,

may God hold you in the palm of His hand.

"And may our love be more fierce than our grief, more enduring than our tears." 2
Amen.

(1) Newell, *Listening for the Heartbeat of God: A Celtic Spirituality* (Paulist Press: 1997),

(2) <http://paintedprayerbook.com/2014/10/24/it-is-hard-being-wedded-to-the-dead/>