

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR CAROLYN WILSON | JULY 30, 2022

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8 | PSALM 23 | 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4-7 | JOHN 14:1-6

Psalm 23 offers two visions of God. The first and better known one is God the shepherd. “He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name’s sake.” God protects, comforts, and guides. The presence of God gives us stillness, serenity, and quiet.

The second one is God the gracious host. “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” God gives, celebrates, and presides. The presence of God gives us conversation, laughter, and companionship.

Both of those images have some truth to them, but I think Carolyn would have liked the second image better. After all, Carolyn was not known in this community as someone who was particularly still, serene, or quiet. But she was someone people turned to for conversation, laughter, and companionship. Carolyn was never as interested in herself as she was in other people. How they were doing. What was going on in their lives. And, in her conversations with me, how she could pray for them.

I think she would have liked the image of God the host for another reason, too. Because whenever I visited Carolyn, she always wanted to receive communion. Always. At home. Communion. In the hospital. Communion. Through her car window in the parking lot. Communion.

The life that we receive in the Eucharist is eternal life. And eternal life is not simply life that goes on forever. Not simply serenity and quiet. But life abundant. Life with loved ones. Life with joy. What Carolyn understood, perhaps better than many of us, is that life is always something to be received and shared, not something to be achieved and hoarded. Communion was a reminder of the ways that God provided for her in her life and allowed her to provide for others.

And even in our time of grief, the gifts remain the same. As psalmist tells us, God is not merely a generous host with enough food to provide for all, but God is also a courageous host. Even the shadow of death can’t stop God from nourishing our lives. There has never been a time in Carolyn’s life when goodness and mercy did not follow her. Yes, there were times when they were less apparent. But the gifts and provisions of God’s mercy never left her.

And every time we gather together at Christ’s table, just as we do today, God prepares a place for each of us. We are never unwanted guests in the presence of God. But guests of the one who always builds a longer table.

Because God’s generosity and abundance isn’t constrained by the presence of our enemies, not by illness, not by grief, certainly not by death. God goes on giving and preparing and inviting us into eternal joy. And so even in death, just as she was in life, Carolyn is present at God’s great banquet.

May light perpetual shine on her. And may God’s banquet never cease.

Joseph Schattauer Paillé, Pastor

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