

With Thanksgiving for the Life of
Joyce Jeanette Anderson
October 8, 1936 + August 11, 2016
Is48:12-17; Ps23; Gal5:21-25; Jn14:1-10

Near and not far off.

Known and not unknown.

Lo, I am with you.

And, you know where I am going.

These are theological terms, statements our scripture attributes to God. But these are also personal terms, identities we knew in Joyce.

We've heard loving descriptions of this mother and grandmother, with stories and characteristics you almost certainly recognize also for sister, aunt, and step-mother, friend and teacher. Again, with the stunning summary statement that "God is love," in Joyce, we similarly knew deeply invested care.

She was devoted to you, to your wellbeing, which is another stunning statement because it's true for all of you gathered today, and for so many more people, as well. She loved to learn what was happening in your life, caring in both joys and struggles, with an amazing memory to hold all those details. I know this, because I also experienced it. Joyce was one of those rare people where in these past weeks I could walk into her hospital room for a pastoral care visit, and walk out of the room feeling more like I'd been cared for, and also more in touch with others, like hearing the latest ins and outs of Jenny buying a new house.

Though I've only gotten to know her a bit in these past months, that feels representative of the care you knew from Joyce, whether for your whole life, or in a brief encounter. Five daughters knew the care and love of this mother, the one who could discipline you for wrecking the car as a child by making you help prepare potato salad for a family gathering. That's a remarkable kind of love, as you know,

and as your friends were occasionally jealous of. It's the kind of care that persisted and was apparently unflappable even after your father's death, and the care and love that expanded to more family when she met Eldon, and as you were choosing partners, and as grandkids arrived, and on and on. You got to know best this very present and invested love of Joyce.

Others experienced it from her in innumerable fleeting moments. This is that central identity of Joyce as a nurse and—maybe even more—as a nurse's nurse. She not only tended to sickness but to the whole person. She didn't just hand on knowledge as a teacher, but valued the whole shape of life for her students. Still around UW Hospital in these weeks were those who either had known Joyce through the years, or were getting to know her in this way still. Even those who had never met her received from her, perhaps most vividly in her efforts on behalf of hospice care. In precisely this moment of confronting death with comfort and dignity, she appreciated the full circle of receiving what she had helped offer to so many others.

For those of this Advent Lutheran and Madison Christian Community, I should pause to say how Joyce valued you, though you almost certainly still can say it better than I can. She identified herself here, and amid many groups, in worship or at breakfast. She cherished the prayer shawl in these weeks and was showing off the card fashioned by the quilters. And Joyce was still looking forward to more reading with book group, to the wide variety you'd choose, even if it weren't what she would've picked herself.

That's another mark of her personality: the teacher was always also a learner, eager for new connections, to explore new places and discover new things. That's true in her travels near and far, right up to that last voyage to Alaska with

Carol, when she got sick enough that they needed to come home, which led to more and more medical investigations and finally the experience of hospice and the end.

At this point, I should say something about God. After all, I've said lots about Joyce. More than I usually would say about a person in a funeral sermon. But that isn't because you needed me to describe her or say nice things about her. Rather, I said so much about Joyce because I also wanted you to hear that about God, a God invested in you (as Joyce was), caring for you (as Joyce did), never out to punish but to redeem you, close to you and knowing you in all kinds of ways (as Joyce lived right until the end), always seeking more for you.

This has been the language of our Bible readings. The verses from Isaiah aren't a typical funeral reading, but are chosen for the Joyce\God pairing. It described God as "first and last," meaning present before our birth and through it all and beyond death. Isaiah declared God's love for and investment in the people, with a persistent will on their behalf—on your behalf—that would not be subverted, in those times by armies or calamities, or in our midst today by sickness and death. Isaiah proclaims God to be near, not hidden off in secret. God is with you, calling to teach and guide. So as we knew that in Joyce, we know it in God.

David's reading from Galatians gives it a clear explanation, that we were able to know these good things in Joyce because they were gifts from God, these fruits of the Spirit. The love, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, and more that Joyce shared with us came not as something Joyce had to strive after, but arose in her so naturally and directly as the blessing from God.

The familiar words of Psalm 23 lead us to see this presence in various settings. Sometimes

you knew Joyce in the moments of providing, in preparing a table, even as she did for funeral services like these, or in times of quiet reflection like book group and Bible study, or in nourishing meadows of teaching, or in dark valleys, like those who knew Joyce during medical care or from hospice. This says God, too, is amid all those times and places.

And, finally, Jesus explains this whole premise in the gospel reading: as you have seen me, you have seen God. In some way, we can claim and believe that line of Jesus for Joyce.

But we also know there are limits. For all of her travels and explorations and curiosity, there are places she couldn't go, not only for completing the Alaska trip, but that she is not with you now. For all of her past care, she is no longer able to be that. You have amazing memories and plenty to share, and you can also go on to embody some of that care and compassion that Joyce had been, but she won't be present to be that for you anymore, and so finally, we need this word of God that proclaims something more, that isn't only accompanying you in times of dying, but that will go beyond death and bring you to new life. This is the promise of resurrection that we look to in Jesus, a promise for you to live into, and the promise for Joyce from a God who is known, who is near, who is with you, and who will bring you home with Joyce forever.