

Marilyn Hewlett - A Homily Preached by Susan M. Flanders
June 13, 2005 – St. John's, Norwood Parish

When I came to St. John's in 1998 and we were planning my installation service, the very first person people recommended as a reader for one of the scripture passages was Marilyn Hewlett. She was known for her excellence as a lector - excellence rooted undoubtedly in her early years when she won an oratory prize and worked as a speech and English teacher. And so Marilyn read Isaiah - about God doing a new thing, and she did so beautifully, and I was honored by her participation in the evening.

Since then, as I've come to know Marilyn, there are things about this service that speak profoundly of who she was and how much she brought to this church, to our cathedral and to the wider community.

Marilyn was exacting and once took me to task almost ferociously for not singing "A Mighty Fortress is our God" on Reformation Sunday. I can remember her just over there by the door, shaking her finger in my face! Born and confirmed originally as a Lutheran, she was not about to sit still as our two denominations have been drawing close and let me overlook this opportunity. But more than exacting, Marilyn was clear, and I thank her for the detailed directions she left us for this service - readings, hymns, prayers - all carefully chosen.

Marilyn and I didn't talk theology; she was reserved in that way. So I venture to offer from the hymns and readings she chose, some thoughts about the wonderful and mysterious ways in which we feel ourselves connected with God, as I believe Marilyn did.

We think of God so often as out there, far away, and God can feel far away, even absent. But we are connected - connected with God in the beauty of the ongoing gift of God's creation - sparkling, shining, full of glory, as in the opening hymn - a creation which is all around us and includes us, and into which Jesus comes, in even brighter glory.

And, in the magnificent words of St. Paul, we're connected – nothing can separate us from this love of God - for Christian faith, Jesus is that connection. He lived and died, as we all do, but he showed us God in the very flesh we inhabit - Jesus as God's love with us, no matter what – "love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven to earth come down", as the next hymn goes. We are flawed, humble dwellings for God's love on earth. And then - we go finally, from this world of space and time, to dwell with God. The one who has inhabited our very flesh takes us back to live forever in God's dwelling place, prepared for each of us. This is Jesus' assurance to Thomas and the disciples in the gospel passage we heard.

How can we know the way? Only through the gift and grace of faith. How can we embrace what the book of Wisdom tells us - our souls are in the hands of God; they are at peace; the faithful will abide with God in love.

Having known Marilyn Hewlett, and something of her life, helps us, I think, to know the way, helps us embrace what these readings and hymns proclaim. They say to us that God comes to us and stays with us in so many ways - ways we expect, and ways we don't. These passages affirm the faith that we live with God and go to God when this life ends. And they proclaim that in Jesus, we meet God's presence, and in Jesus we find our hope for new life - always.

Anyone who lived as Marilyn did - in quiet, but firm devotion, in loving service to so many, with dignity and restraint in the face of her illness, and with a serenity and hope in her last days, shows us that face of God's love. We give thanks for her life, and we send with her our prayers as she goes beyond - into that place where we will, one day, all see God - face to face. Amen.