

Requiem for Betty Alexander
October 19, 2013
The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Creation, Redemption, Sanctification

Betty left us detailed instructions to follow today for her Requiem as we give thanks for her life. I was surprised to see that she wanted us to read two Psalms. Perhaps she couldn't choose between them. Or perhaps she wanted us to remember how the Psalms reflect the full range of human emotion and show us every dimension of our lives in relationship with one another and in relationship with God. In the Psalms we hear about the beauty of nature; we hear praise, adoration, faith, judgment, rebuke, anger, forgiveness, grace, law, cursing, suffering and death.

The Psalms are paradoxical, complicated, hopeful, generous in expressing God's love for us and our love for God. Betty was paradoxical, complicated, hopeful, generous. The two Psalms she chose for her service remind us of the first two activities of God: creation and redemption.

Psalm 139 is all about God creating us, knowing us, protecting us. The first 11 verses on page 474 in the Burial office introduce us to the love of God in creation; the second half of the Psalm not read today continues this theme of creation "*You yourself created my inmost parts, you knit me together in my mother's womb...I thank you because I am marvelously made...*" Betty knew her Creator and she herself rejoiced in God's creation. I think she especially was drawn to the third verse of Psalm 139, "*For lo, there is not a word in my tongue, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether...*" Many of us heard often those words from Betty's tongue.

The first five verses of Psalm 106 introduce us to God's work of redemption – salvation. Read the 43 verses that follow these in the Burial office. They tell us of the Exodus, the wandering in the wilderness, and God's saving love. Betty knew God's salvation. She knew her redeemer.

C. S. Lewis wrote a book, *Reflections on the Psalms*, in 1958, long after his own conversion and just five years before his death. Lewis writes, "most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licenses and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than the logical connections." Betty had a wonderful way of holding together and expressing both the emotional and the logical. Lewis writes that in the Psalms we see that "God is inviting us to enjoy him." Betty enjoyed God. She delighted in worship and praise; scholarship and song. She loved singing in our choir for decades. And she loved praying in this church.

The other readings Betty has chosen for us to reflect upon show us the third activity of God – Sanctification – taking our lives and working through all of us by the power of God's Spirit. This process of sanctification takes a lifetime, as Betty well knew. And it continues into eternity. "*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God...they are at*

peace...we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day... we are of good courage..."

Jesus tried very hard on the night before his death to help his disciples realize this process of sanctification leads though suffering and death to newness of life. *"I go to prepare a place for you...I am the way the truth, the life..."* Betty knew God's Spirit would empower her to persevere through her own suffering, through her own death.

Some of us were angry, or sad, or certainly disappointed that she didn't try more treatments, more medicine, a more aggressive fighting of her illness over the last months. Yet Betty always liked to do things in her own way. She was fiercely independent in that respect. But she was also totally dependent on God's loving care.

She shared this faith, this hope, this love from her bed at home, waiting to embrace physical death during her last weeks. In the Psalms and in the other readings Betty chose for today, we see Betty's enjoyment of God, the creator and redeemer, and we see Betty's longing for God's sanctification, a longing for heaven, for life after this physical life, for life totally in the Spirit.

Over the last 24½ years, Betty has shared much with me in our life together here at Grace Church. For many years I would see her on Tuesday mornings as part of the needlepoint and knitting group (*"...you knit me together in my mother's womb."* Psalm 139:12) I have a hat she knitted for me. She made so many hats and scarves and gave them all away. She enjoyed doing things for others and she came up with the idea of saving the old choir loft spindles and hanging cloth on them to sell and donate the proceeds to our Building Fund.

Betty also gave me a picture and a piece of the Berlin Wall. She had visited Berlin as the wall was being torn down. She had a passion for peace and justice; for the poor and oppressed.

And I will always remember the postcard she gave me, showing Jesus head back, laughing. What a great sense of humor Betty shared with us – jokes, stories, some cynicism, much love and joy.

We give thanks to God for all Betty shared with us, most especially her belief in God – Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier.

Wisdom 3:1-5, 9

Psalm 139

Psalm 106

1 Corinthians 4:16—5:9

John 14:1-6