

Sarah Gabbert Requiem
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The Rev. Robert H. Malm

Transcendent Power

St. Paul calls God's love "*transcendent power.*" This was the power that transformed Paul's life starting with his conversion on the road to Damascus. This was the power that sustained him during all his missionary travels over some 20 years. This was the power that gave him the strength to endure imprisonments, torture, persecution and his martyrdom on Rome. Paul knew this love of God, this transcendent power, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of grace from the Spirit.

As we give thanks for Sarah's life today, we can affirm that Sarah also knew God's love through the transcendent power of the Holy Spirit. She discovered this love as a child. Love led her to marry and have three children. Love sustained Sarah as her children grew to adulthood.

The transcendent power of God's love helped Sarah through the years of treatments as she battled cancer. She saw the gift of God's love in her grandchildren. This love, this power gave her the strength, the courage, the patience to face her own physical weakness and approaching death during the last months of her life.

I was not able to spend as much time with Sarah as I would have liked before she moved to Colonial Beach. During the first four or five months of 2014 I was on leave recovering from a serious accident. I was so thankful Mother Elizabeth and our LEMs and others from Grace Church could have Holy Communion with her and visit regularly.

Sarah found God's transcendent power and love in her decision to move from her home on Ivanhoe Street, where she lived for decades and raised her children. This move took courage. The last time Sarah and I had Communion together was at her neighbors' across the street from her home just before her move. She had great peace about moving.

Many months later, last August after I returned from my summer vacation, I drove down to Colonial Beach to have Communion with Sarah, Anna and Christina. Sarah was very weak, but she had great peace. She smiled as we talked, the twinkle still in her eyes. Six days later she died, surrounded by the love of her family and knowing God's love, God's transcendent power.

At the beginning of the fourth chapter of his Second Letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes:

We do not lose heart ... we have this treasure in earthen vessels to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed ...

Everything Paul experienced brought him closer to God. The same was true for Sarah.

We know the strength of God's love as we accept our own human weakness. Paul experienced suffering; through his suffering his life was transformed. Through suffering we are transformed from glory to glory. From the temporal to the eternal, from what is seen to what is unseen. Our "*earthen vessels*," our physical bodies have treasure inside – this treasure is God's redeeming love, transforming each one of us. This is what we see in Jesus' experience of the cross. His passion leads to his glory.

Those who battle terminal illness know the reality of human weakness. Decades ago, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, in her work with children dying of terminal illness, described five stages of reacting to the approach of physical death: denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. I think St. Paul realized these stages in his own life and wrote about them in his letters. The courage Paul writes about might be the same as the acceptance Kubler-Ross identified.

Sarah had an amazing amount of courage. She showed us the gifts of the Holy Spirit listed by St. Paul: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Galatians 5:22). Sarah gave us these gifts. We are all blessed – her family, her friends, her parish – by the transcendent power of God's love Sarah shared with us, most especially these last two years. And as we move forward in our lives, we are called to share these gifts, this transcendent power of God's love, with others.

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33

1 Corinthians 4:16—5:9

John 14:1-6