

Meditation for Connie Burgess

I'd like to begin by speaking of my very first encounter with Connie. She was, I think, 89 at the time. It was my 'candidate Sunday.' That was the Sunday when I came here to preside and preach and after worship, my wife and I left the sanctuary while the church members discussed my candidacy and vote on me becoming the Pastor of Union Church. When we got to celebrations and concerns, Connie's hand was the first to shoot up. I called on her, she stood and said how happy she was to be back after her second hip replacement surgery and how proud that she was to be driving again. She said that she in fact drove here from Plymouth that morning. I celebrated her return and thanked her for the warning that she's driving again. Connie parking that big bomber in our parking lot is the stuff of legend. Howard Martin used to say that parking for Connie was a contact sport.

After she's stopped driving a few years ago, Lenore and I drove to Plymouth to visit with Connie. Lenore told me that she'd told Connie that she was bringing a special guest but didn't tell Connie who it was. When we arrived and got through the greeting, we went to sit down. The first thing Connie said was, "I was hoping it would be the Organist. She's really funny." I'm thinking, 'chopped liver.' Actually, it was a really nice visit. I did Communion for her, which she loved. Connie was the definition of the popular book and phrase, "The Greatest Generation." These are the people, as described by Tom Brokaw; that

endured the poverty of the great depression as children, defeated one of the greatest evils in history, and went on to build the greatest society that ever existed on the face of the earth.

Connie, on the surface, lived a good life. I don't think she experience fame or fortune. There are no expectations that I've heard that a bridge will be named after her, or that he is a member of a Hall of Fame or the winner of a Nobel Prize. Nor are there reports of murder convictions, bank heists, or revolutions attempted. Connie lived a good life. Connie loved her country and loved her family and was proud of both. She worked hard and participated in this world in positive ways: following the rules, being trustworthy, getting married and raising a family, just living a good solid life. She lived a life of faith and family, how wonderful.

Connie had a passion for quilting. We have some of her art work here. She was a founder along with Bell Kane of our 'needles for love' group. The group meets on Wednesday mornings downstairs from the vestry. It has a number of members now, some of whom are not part of our church. Once Connie stopped driving to the church, she continued to make the quilts at home. She moved to baby quilts as they are more manageable. Lord knows how many quilts she made. Certainly hundreds, maybe thousands. She loved doing them but her joy was in that most of them went to charities.

I'd like to speak to the unique place that Connie held in this church. She deeply loved Union Church. She raised her children in this church. She wore many hats including Sunday school teacher. Her children speak of how strict she was with them in Sunday school so the other kids would fall in line. There is a story of when her husband was doing well in the oil business, the church got into financial difficulty. Connie made a loan to the church to bail them out then forgave the loan. Connie grieved the fact that she outlived her money. She never expected to live this long. Folks talk about her all the time, here. Never is there a time when she was spoken of when there wasn't a smile on everyone's face and more often than not, laughter.

If talking were an Olympic event, Connie would have won more gold metals than Michael Phelps. I want the family to know that Connie will always be loved in this holy place. Her memory will never die.

And we can trust in God, who gives us life, and who gave Connie life, that the full meaning of that life is to be found in grace- the love of God. For it is this love that gives to people meaning and purpose and that makes the whole of life real and true. It is in this spirit that we bid farewell to this our sister, who is in a close presence to God, who is restored to Christ, where faith, hope, and love abide. AMEN