

*Reflection for the funeral of Barbara Matthews*

St Philip's Anglican Church O'Connor

Reverend Rebecca Newland

4 July 2013

It says in the Book of Ecclesiastes that, *There is a time for everything, a season for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. (Ecc 3).*

We're here because Barbara Jane Laimbeer Matthews' time to die has come. Because of that, we have this time to lose ... someone we love. So, we cry. We grieve. We embrace as we comfort one another. It's not all grief and sadness, though. Barbara died in a good old age and full of years so this is also a time to keep and laugh over good memories. And what wonderful memories. Lover of life. Asker of questions. Challenger of the status quo.

Generous giver of time, talent, skills and energy. Teacher, work colleague, aunt, great aunt, friend, neighbour and sister in Christ. I love the way her face lit up when I visited. I loved the way she told me what cities to visit and why. Always welcoming. Always interested, right until the end: an adventurous woman who coloured outside the lines. Barbara.

So here we are, as the prayer book says "In the midst of life we are in death," caught between the two as it were, joy and sorrow; as fourteenth century mystic, Julian of Norwich, put it, in the "marvelous mixture of wellbeing and woe" that is life.

In this life that is a "marvelous mixture of wellbeing and woe" there is a constant: something that is with us always and calls to us. It is something that called to Barbara and calls her now. It is something that enlivens our being, surrounds us with love and hope and leads us through life and death. In our reading from Proverbs it is known as Sophia, the wisdom of God, the Creator's first creation.

In the beginning of John's Gospel it is the eternal Word who is made flesh and dwelt among us - Jesus the Christ, who embodied God's love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness and showed us the way, the truth and the life. Wisdom says in Proverbs that she walks in the way of righteousness and justice, she love those who love her and will be found by those who seek her. She tells us she has set her table for a banquet and says, "Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Lay aside immaturity and live, and walk in the way of insight".

This connection, this oneness between Sophia and the Christ, has been known, acknowledged and debated by theologians throughout the centuries. In funeral reflections I do not often join these dots but with Barbara how could I not?! For Barbara was a woman of spirit and wisdom, who answered the call and lived life with a thirst for justice and joy, who added her voice to the call for truth and justice. Who fought the good fight and finished the race. Barbara is now in that place where her deepest questions can be answered, where love conquers all and where we pray she has found her being at one with Divine oneness.

And so on this day we give thanks. We give thanks because of the gift of Barbara in our lives. We give thanks for her independence, her courage, her strong will, her care of others and her generosity. We give thanks for her great love and appreciation of family, all her family, and the ways she reached out over the years. We rejoice that we knew her. We rejoice that somehow she became part of our lives, touched us in small and great ways, taught us and loved us. We give thanks that how she was in the world taught us things we needed to learn about ourselves and love itself. May she rest in peace and may we rejoice. May we hear the call of Wisdom and live life to the full, pursuing justice, loving peace and walking in the way of insight. Amen.