

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

Ann Williams 1933-2010

Reflection given at her funeral by the Revd Rebecca Newland, 23 September 2010.

It is a sad day today to be farewelling Ann. The loss of someone we love is hard and difficult. We are left with all our memories, all the good times and the bad. All the longing and love and need. Sometimes the person who has died was ill, like Ann, and would have suffered and we are left feeling not only the pain of grief and loss, but also upset, confused and possibly angry. My own father died of cancer and it was a most difficult and painful time.

Death, except in a very few cases, is never easy. It is a hard price to pay for the many blessings in living on this beautiful planet and calling it home for three score years and ten if we are lucky. Death leaves us with questions too: "Where is God in all of this? Does God even care? What does death mean for Ann and us?"

Jesus, like so many times in his conversations with his listeners, gave an answer to these questions that has stayed with us for over 2000 years. Jesus was sharing with his friends the fact that he was going to be leaving them. They had the hint of an idea that this leaving would be painful. But Jesus also said "*Do not let your heart be troubled, Jesus says, "Believe in God, believe in me."*

When you are in your most severe crisis, the last thing you can hear is often the one thing you need most to hear.

There you are in the hospital waiting room pacing back and forth in a room full of strangers whose faces suggest they are there carrying the same burden you are. Clutching a Styrofoam cup, flipping pages through a magazine you would otherwise never read—or at least not be seen reading in public—but it's what's there on the table and you'll do anything to keep the fear at bay and the minutes moving rapidly along.

And then before you know it the funeral is finally over, the ground all covered, the ashes scattered, the prayers recited and the hymns sung. Now you are left in the living room, platters of food everywhere, flowers in every corner, notes on every table. It's over. You are sitting now with a dull ache, or maybe it's a searing pain, in the heart place where she once lived. The future? Impossible to imagine. The heartache is easier than the daunting task of living into a future without the one who created the past and the present. What's the future without her?

"Let not your heart be troubled, Jesus says, "Believe in God, believe in me."

Jesus' assurance is hard to hear and often we don't hear it. On the lips of anyone but Jesus it can sound sentimental or too much like a nervous attempt at consolation by someone who can't bear the silence of anguish. We've all experienced the simple and well meaning "don't worry" as less than comforting when the person offering it has no clue of the actual reason for the worry that is presently eating up your stomach.

But Jesus himself had a troubled heart when his friend Lazarus died. He wept. And when Judas was preparing to betray him, he wept again - only this time with such anguish that drops of blood spilled from his brow. Jesus knows trouble and he knows a troubled heart. But he also knows your heart and he knows mine.

Preparing his disciples for a future after his death — something incomprehensible to them — he offers precisely the word they and we need to hear, the word we have the most difficulty hearing and yet the one we most need to hear for our freedom. This is not the sentimental consolation of a person uncomfortable with grief; this is God's word for a troubled heart.

God's word is not a momentary escape from pain, but a gift that allows you to live with eyes open and with courage.

“Let not your heart be troubled, Jesus says, “Believe in God, believe in me.”

For Jesus is the way and the truth and the life. Thomas is the only one honest enough to tell Jesus that he has no clue what Jesus is talking about or where he is going. Thomas is always missing things, but he is always honest about it. He is like the one who in a group of stargazers bends down to swat a mosquito at the exactly the wrong time—at the exact moment when the long-awaited meteor flashes across the sky. Thomas is always missing out, so he confesses his cluelessness by saying, “We don't the where you are going and we certainly don't know the way.”

Jesus doesn't offer us a map, a set of directions and a compass. Jesus offers himself. The way is personal - Jesus is the way. The truth is personal: Jesus is the truth. The life is personal: Jesus is the life. You will find life not in propositions but in a person, a particular person—Jesus of Nazareth who came to announce and inaugurate the worldwide reign of God. This is the astonishing news of the gospel. God has opened the way to life through the living Christ who invites you to cast yourself on him. This is “the boundless generosity of God” in Jesus Christ who lived, died and is risen for all. This is one who invites you to be free.

This is the one who has now called Ann home to her place with the God she loved. One of the last things I heard Ann say was that ‘God knows’. Ann trusted that God was with her, knew her and loved her. I do not think Ann's heart was troubled. Despite our grief and loss too can turn to our Lord and find comfort for our hearts and we can commit our sister Ann to his eternal love and care.

“Let not your heart be troubled, Jesus says, “Believe in God, believe in me.”