

As always when we gather like this, in celebration of a life, every one here today brings a very personal perspective on the life of Carol Eliot who was to us sister, wife, mother, mother-in-law, teacher, mentor, colleague, friend and companion on the way. It would take the recollections and reflections of every one of us in this room, and those of the hundreds and hundreds of others who knew and loved her, to form anything approaching a complete sense of this one-of-a-kind human being.

This is especially true of Carol, who had the gift of being fully present in the moment, whenever and wherever. She was always right there with you, so open and honest. She made herself known: her ideas, opinions, questions, likes and dislikes, loves and enthusiasms. She had great loves and enthusiasms: Frank; her boys, Christopher, Andrew and Philip; her daughter-in-law, Susan; and that granddaughter, Anna! She brought them into every conversation. She loved and treasured you. She was so proud of you. As you will always love and treasure her, and be so proud of her and her legacy.

Carol was enthusiastic about her students, the young teachers she mentored and befriended, her colleagues, her many friends. Just as she let herself be known, she always wanted to know about you: your family, your exploits, joys and challenges. She was genuinely interested in people's experiences, their ideas, what made them tick, what remarkable potential she could discern in them.

Welcoming and gracious even when she was weak and uncomfortable in the hospital, Carol was still calling each nurse or aide by name, and introducing them to her visitors. She recognized each and every person as a human being made in the image of God. She wanted each and every one of us to recognize and respect every human being as a child of God, just as she did.

Her sense and practice of mutuality transcended differences in age, background, or belief. It wasn't that she didn't recognize difference—she valued it. A voice for the dissonant and those who did not fit easily, readily into a competitive culture of high accomplishment, she was a humanizing influence. She saw and named our common bonds that extend across all our difference.

Perhaps this was because she was so open to difference within herself. She had deep Baptist roots, yet was a great lover of the Episcopal Cathedral, its architecture and art. She was passionate about the choristers, the boys and the girls. She taught NCS students about the Cathedral for years, and knew more about it than anyone else at the school. Laughingly, proudly, she called herself a “Baptopalian” .

As her illness advanced and the circumference of her world gradually drew in, Carol focused not on her losses but, rather, on the abundance of blessing in her life. She gave so abundantly of herself all her life; in her last months, she received so much. She was aware of all the little wonders of life and the richness they add up to.

Carol loved her life. She faced the reality of death with courage and integrity; but she was not ready to give up this “earthly tent,” not so soon.

We believe that in death, life is changed, not ended; that our life moves forward into a new fullness we can barely imagine. The only images we have of this resurrection life are the images of this world. They are incomplete, but the best we can do. Jesus spoke of the seed that falls into the earth and dies, because only then can it bear much fruit. The Apostle Paul wrote about the change that happens to the body: we are not swallowed up by death. Our mortal body is “swallowed up by *life*.” We pass not into nothingness but into a new fullness.

It is as if this life, even when a person has been so powerfully/ intensely engaged and engaging—with other people, with ideas and principles, everything that can be learned, known and taught—this life will turn out to have been no more substantial than a tent. Good to camp out in for a while, a shelter, even a home, but only temporary. Not able to contain forever the radiance and fullness of a radiant human being made in God’s image.

This body, the container in which we know and love one another now, is not meant to last. Like a tent, it could never possibly hold the eternal weight—the fullness—of glory beyond all measure being prepared for us.

The Apostle Paul reaches/gropes for words to describe what he senses must be so—it will take “a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” to contain such a weight of glory. This life and this body are too

limited, too weak to hold or take in all the fullness of who we were created to be. What we have known here is only the barest glimmer of what is to come.

In the last few days of her life, Carol herself was groping for words to describe what she was sensing—a feeling of moving gently, carried as on a wave, entirely peaceful. “How did it change?” she asked. She was filled with wonderment to the end, curious whether it is like this for everybody, and how did this happen. *Grace* is the name we gave it.

There are things we cannot figure out or really understand in this life. But Carol knows now, or is beginning to know, as she comes into that eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, into the fullest presence and embrace of knowing and being known. It is this hope, this assurance that can help us make our peace, in time, with Carol’s having journeyed on now, beyond our sight, hearing, touch.

The last clear word we exchanged was *Namaste*, the Hindu bidding said on meeting and parting. *Namaste*, which means “I honor the place in you where the entire universe resides, I honor the place in you of love, of light, of truth, of peace. I honor the place within you where if you are in that place in you and I am in that place in me, there is only one of us.”<sup>1</sup>

*Namaste, Carol.*

I give thanks for the time we were given to be with her in this life. I give thanks that in the communion of saints that spans the gulf of death we meet her still in that place of oneness, of knowing fully as we are known.

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<sup>1</sup>Ram Dass, *Grist for the Mill*.