

In thanksgiving for the life of Patsy Stann
The Church of the Redeemer, Bethesda, Maryland
The Rev. Susan C. Thon

January 28, 2012

This room is filled with the powerful physical and spiritual expression of Patsy's gift for friendship and caring. Represented here is the whole interconnected framework of relationships Patsy created, nurtured and enjoyed.

Overlapping communities of family, colleagues and friends stretch from her childhood—cousins and friends—to college and work, family friends and neighbors with Jeff, sewing and quilting groups, churches, bible studies; friends around the country through outreach programs like Christmas in April, and into Honduras with Las Hermanas de Dorcas and the Trinidad Conservation Project.

Many of you were part of the network of friends who cared for Patsy and Jeff during her illness—visiting, calling, bringing food and company, praying, sending notes, bringing communion, sharing stories and news.

It's probably inevitable that I imagine these overlapping communities as like a quilt, made up of many pieces: colorful, in varied shapes and sizes, harmonious and contrasting; each piece chosen with an eye to its unique character and beauty; all carefully stitched together by many hands working together into a lively and beautiful pattern that makes a whole.

Patsy was very much in this world, in all her fulness, in and among you. She leaves much with you, tangible and intangible: beautiful quilts and linens she imagined and created, and taught others to make. (Some are here, downstairs, gracing homes of friends and family.) She has contributed to better lives for countless people. She leaves the gift of friendship and love, the gift that brings you here.

Knowing that this day would come, sooner or later, some time ago Patsy talked about her life. She wanted people to know—she wanted you to know—how grateful she was for the many good things she had been given. For her mother, the good secondary and college education she had, her life with Jeff, for Katherine and Andy, and in the last 9 months their much anticipated baby. She did not take for granted the great good she was born into and received. She did not feel sorry for herself in her illness. It was a decision she made, in the context of the fulness of her life, a fruit both of her own will and of Grace.

Patsy had the gift of empathy, the capacity and will to travel over, to imagine another person's life. It gave her a broad perspective on herself and her life. "I could be a woman with next to nothing, sitting in the dust somewhere in Africa, grindingly poor. I have been given so much," she said.

I don't know how such a compassionate spirit comes into being, whether some people are just compassionate by nature; whether compassion is learned by imitation and instruction; or whether it comes from some of both. But Patsy's gratitude for her life was a source of her

reaching out, her kindness and compassion toward strangers and friends. Gratitude fed the deep well of joy, laughter, and just plain fun, you have known so well.

Her death leaves a tear in the fabric of your lives and the very fabric of this world. Though we know that the cycle of birth and death are part of the reality of this world, Patsy's passing from this life leaves us stunned. "I go to prepare a place for you," Jesus says to his friends at their last supper together. We have been preparing ourselves for the day of her passing, as Patsy herself prepared, but still it comes as a shock, somehow unexpected.

There is so much of her present, and yet she is absent. Her very vibrance, the evidence of her continues to bring joy and yet at the same time makes for deep sorrow. You will go on missing her, with greater and lesser intensity that comes and goes, and comes again.

There are things that help in this:

That all of you care so much for each other, and especially for Jeff, Katherine, and all their family.

The wonder of new life coming so soon in Benjamin, holding him warm and close. Katherine was eight and a half months pregnant when her mother died. There was uncertainty as to whether to have this service today, or to wait until some time later. Almost as soon as the decision was made and announced, at 2:00 a.m. on Wednesday, Katherine went into labor. Some wise and compassionate Spirit must have known, *this family needs this baby, now*. Benjamin Flanagan is here, now, today, not quite three days old.

The assurance that Patsy's life is changed, not ended helps and will help as time goes on.

The practice of gathering people in a spirit of love and fellowship is infused with the holy. As Patsy gathered people in, and together, she now is gathered into the great communion of all the saints, all God's beloved, where there are no more tears, no more suffering, no death, but eternal life.

She is healed and made whole now in every way. Because the grave was not the end of Jesus' story it is not the end of Patsy's, or ours. The grave is not the stronghold of death; it is the gateway to eternal life in the Father's house.

We can believe this because Jesus came to the disciples again, as he promised, and they knew him. Not always at their first sight of him after his resurrection because, while he was himself, he was changed. In resurrection we do not cycle back only to what was. Life moves forward into unimaginable Presence and Light, into new creation.

Today we commend Patsy into the hands of Christ. We hand her over to the love and mercy of God, who has always held and carried her in this world. All the goodness and beauty of her, all her fullness is enfolded in the fullness of God.

When you next see her you may not recognize her at first in all her radiance. But then you will realize that she is the beloved one you have known all along; that what you knew and were able to see here was only the barest glimmer of who she was created to be and goes on becoming.

This is our faith. This is our hope. This is our help today and always.

Remember your servant, Lord, according to the favor which you bear to your people; and grant that, increasing in knowledge and love of you, she may go from strength to strength in the life of perfect service in your heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.