

HOMILY: Church of the Holy Spirit, Wayland, Mass. June 6, 2009

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR BARBARA PERRY

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33; Psalm 23; Revelation 7:9-17; John 14:1-6a

*“And I will raise you up on eagle’s wings, bear you on the breath of dawn
and make you ... shine like sun, and hold you in the palm of my hand.”*

What a fitting refrain to sing as we gather to celebrate the long life journey of our sister BARBARA WACEY PERRY, to commit her remains to their final place of rest in the beautiful memorial garden in the woods beside her dear husband Wesley, and to celebrate her entrance into the larger life eternal, with God.

In today’s gospel Jesus said:

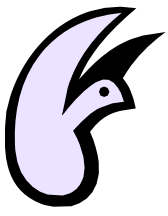
*“Do not let your hearts be troubled...where I am, there you will be also...You know
the way to the place where I am going....I am the way and the truth and the life.”*

What better place to reflect on Barbara’s long journey of life, than here in the nave of this church which Barbara and her husband Wesley helped to bring into being almost 50 years ago. Have you ever looked up at the ceiling of the church, the graceful curves of the roof beams, so much like the hull of a sailing ship? No wonder this part of a church is called the nave – from the same root as our words navy and naval.

Perhaps we can look up at this ceiling and think of New England sailing ships and many trips Barbara and the family must have taken, back and forth between Wayland and their home in Freeport Maine, and their summer home on Bustin’s Island just a ferry ride away.

And yet as we look at the front of the church we also see the strong focus, or can we say the anchor, which the cross of Jesus always provided on all her journeys, whether she lived in Wayland or in Maine. This great wooden cross was constructed by Wesley himself when the church was being built. And Ruth Chamberlin was telling me how in the early 1960s, even before the church was built, she and Barbara traveled around eastern Massachusetts, “church shopping” she said, looking at all the existing churches to gather ideas that might be incorporated in the design of the Church of the Holy Spirit that was soon to be built. It is good that we gather in this place today to give thanks for the pioneering work of Barbara and Wesley – and many others – in the founding of this church.

And as we celebrate Barbara’s long life journey, it is also good that we reflect on the 23rd psalm which we have just read together, reminding us that she was never alone, and we need not be alone, on the journey of life. This beloved psalm bears testimony to the faith in God which was such a central part of Barbara’s life. And the reading from Revelation echoes the psalm,



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assuring us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd who guided Barbara, and, if we take him as our shepherd, will guide us, to springs of living water and will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want,

(The psalmist says, and we can imagine Barbara saying).

He makes me to lie down in Green pastures; he leads me beside the still waters.

He restores my soul; he leads me in the paths of righteousness...

Barbara was, I'm told, someone who loved flowers and plants, the ocean shore and the woodlands and the birds who came to the bird-feeder outside her window, even to the last days of her life. Of course there must have been times when she was down, times of struggle and sorrow. But I'm sure she knew that the Good Shepherd was always there to "restore her soul" and "lead her in paths of righteousness."

*Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:
for you are with me, your rod and your staff they comfort me.*

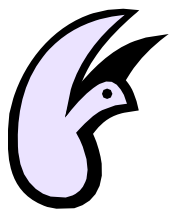
Even in the worst of times, sickness, loss of loved ones, and in the shadow of death itself, she must have known that the Good Shepherd was still with her. For the psalmist, death itself has no power. Death isn't like a great cliff against which you crash and fall. Death is only a shadow, like the dark shadow in a valley between two steep cliffs, something through which – by the grace of God – you can pass unharmed. And there, in the future, in the place beyond time, where Barbara's eternal life continues, God's loving care is still with her – forever.

And, as we read in the psalm about how God – *prepares a table before me, anoints my head, fills my cup to overflowing* – so we can think of Barbara, and Wesley, at a heavenly banquet with all their favorite foods and drinks and, no doubt, with her favorite, Key Lime pie, for desert.

*Surely [- the psalm concludes -] goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days
of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.*

Indeed, it is good to hold Psalm 23 in our minds as we celebrate Barbara's life and faith in the Good Shepherd. Let us thank God for the ways she shared that faith with others: - raising her children and grandchildren to love God, showing God's love in friendship to so many, and helping to create this beautiful place of worship.

And as we think of this psalm, let us each ask ourselves if we also know what it means to have God as our Good Shepherd. In John 10:14 Jesus says "I am the Good Shepherd." In today's Gospel he says "I am the WAY and the TRUTH and the LIFE." And throughout the gospels he says "follow me" – wherever I lead on your journey of life, "follow me".



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Perhaps, at a moment like this, when we say farewell to a dear friend, we can hear Jesus calling to us, offering to be the Good Shepherd of our lives, a Good Shepherd who will guide us in the way, the truth and the life.

Is the Lord Jesus your shepherd?

If he is, you need not fear the valley of the shadow of death, for he will be with you, always.