

Rhodus Commemoration

October 6, 2018

Words offered graveside at the request of Mike and Susan Rhodus.

We have gathered here today to celebrate the life of our friend and our family member, Betty Carolyn Rhodus.

In her death, we are grieved and shaken to lose a mother, a sibling, a soul mate, an encourager, an example, and a friend.

We grasp for meaning and ache with loss, and our hearts feel hollow.

But we also have reason to celebrate.

Betty Rhodus was a woman of faith, and her faith helped her to deal with many hardships throughout her life. Her faith helped her to know hope throughout her long medical challenges, because she found in her faith God's love for her despite her circumstances.

As we stand here before a casket in this graveyard, let us not be dismayed.

I am reminded of the story in the last chapter of Matthew about two women visiting a tomb.

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On the third day after Jesus' death, the Scriptures in Matthew 28 tell us Mary and Mary Magdalene went to his tomb hoping to visit the body of their lost love.

When they arrived, there was a violent earthquake, and an angel in gleaming light appeared before them. The instance was so remarkable, the soldiers guarding Jesus's tomb fainted. But the angel came to Mary and Mary Magdalene and spoke:

"Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."

The next verses tell us that the women were told to leave the tomb and go and tell their friends that Jesus was not there. The women left the tomb, and on their way back into town, they meet Jesus, risen- not in the ground.

This story is important because it reminds us of several key thoughts.

1) This story tells us that there is life after the body dies.

This notion is important because it helps us to recognize that Betty is not simply an inanimate body here, being placed into the ground. Our faith- Betty's faith- tells us that when we are no longer in the flesh, our spirits are still in God's care.

For those of us left behind in this world, we hurt from the loss of a loved one. Let us take comfort realizing the Creator still takes care of his creation when the flesh fails. God is still love, and He still loves each and every one of His creatures beyond our life spans.

Betty is not simply a body here in this casket. She is not here and in spirit, in God's presence.

2) This story tells us that we grieve best together.

Grief is a normal part of loss, and each one of us grieves in our own way. We grieve in part because we have lost connection and continuity with a person who has had an impact on our life.

It is interesting to note in the story of the two Mary's, the angel told the women to leave the tomb, and to go quickly and talk with the disciples about Jesus. In their case, as they went to do this, Jesus physically appeared to them. In our case, I think the suggestion is just as warranted because it helps to keep that lost loved one close to us as we move from sorrow to acceptance.

It's by our shared recollections and memories and photographs and humorous tales that we help each other move through grief, and also retain some of the presence of a loved one lost.

By grieving together, we do keep the departed near, and find help in healing as time ebbs on. We are given a second intimacy with them through one another.

3) This story tells us God knows where you are in your loss.

It is sobering to know that each of our lives, like Betty's, is destined for a similar fate. We all will face death.

The Scriptures say He knows how we are formed, and that we all come from dust, and that we all return to dust. But He also says that we have been drawn up by his loving kindness, and that we are His beloved, and that not a hair falls from a person's head without Him knowing.

God knows who you are.

God knows how you are.

God knows where you are at in all of this.

"Do not be afraid", says the angel to the two Mary's, "because I know you are looking for Jesus."

God's messenger still says today "Do not be afraid, because I know you are looking for Betty."

In I Corinthians 13, the great chapter on love in the New Testament, Paul assesses our situation here on earth aptly: on eternal things, we can only see things as if we are looking at a dim reflection in the mirror.

We do not have full, clear answers about what happens after death- but we can know the One who holds all of the answers.

And He is the One who knows you, and loves you in this time of pain, and in your moments of need.

He is the One who Betty turned to as her source of hope in this life: the God of Love, who provided the hope of resurrection in His Son, Jesus.

Because it is through love- His love, and our love in Him- that death is conquered. And he has left us with a charge to focus on the occupation:

Love one another.

One of the best salves for wrestling with loss lies in loving others.

We practice this here today by exclaiming our love for the person of Betty Rhodus and the life she has lived, and the impact she has made on each of us.

And we entrust her spirit to You, O Lord, for safe-keeping, until You Who Knows All calls your beloved unto yourself.