Alice Mary Bento Weir

Memorial Service/All Saints’

September 29, 2018

Last Sunday, we had no electricity for our 8:00 am church service. The church was in darkness. We lit more candles more torches and pulled out our flashlights on our cell phones, and with a little ingenuity and faith, we experienced a very intimate service, held together by the Light of Christ (literally).

Just before communion, as part of our Episcopal liturgy, the alms basins were brought up. We had no organ music, and so, as a way to honor the gifts received, I held up the alms basins and said, “All things come of Thee O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee.”

We had just prayed for Alice earlier in the service and for Alice’s family, especially Marilyn, Janet, and David and all of her grandchildren, nieces and nephews, and friends.

As I held up the basins and said, “All things come of Thee O Lord, and of Thine own have we given Thee,” I had a very strong sense of Alice. What a perfect refrain for Alice’s life.

All things come of Thee O Lord, and of thine own have we given Thee.

Alice lived her life, not taking things for granted. Things that came her way were blessings, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant (like the 8@8 dinners at RiverMead or a friend removing her air conditioning units, or throwing a surprise birthday party, or writing cards). She was intentional about recognizing these simple things as God’s gifts. She lived with gratitude. Even with difficulties and hardships, Alive found a way to be faithful, loyal, and hopeful.

God was good, and she belonged to God. Everything that was hers, was not really hers, and with that life understanding, Alice shared what she had- with open hands and an open heart.

I, of course, knew Alice from church services. She was here often, sitting next to her daughter Marilyn and would join us for coffee hour next door at Reynolds and for many other special events. All Saints’ was her church and she loved it here.

Yet, where I had really come to know Alice was at the Community Suppers. She came often, and it was there around the table sharing a meal of homemade soup and bread, that I learned how funny Alice was… sassy, witty, quick, and direct.

She called a spade a spade, with no hesitation, and when there were gasps around the table after some observation or comment, with Marilyn saying, “Mom!” she would smile, with a twinkle in her eye. (“Just saying!”)

In all ways, Alice was herself; she loved life, her family, her church, and her neighbors and friends. She was understated, yet very present, and full of mischief! Like when she joined the fitness center at 83- lifting weights and using the treadmill and the bike. Yes, she was healthy and went to the gym to support her health, but she also knew she was making a statement… with a twinkle in her eye: “If I can do it, so can you!”

Alice was the hub for her family. The center. The force that kept things together. Her strength came from her commitment to love and to help and to make a difference. To help you along the path of feeling supported, so you could trust that you had a community behind you.

Alice loved you, not in spite of your bumps and bruises and when things go bump in the night, but BECAUSE of them. And that’s the great gift of unconditional Love.

It was out of this stance of love, where Alice also had an enduring sense of hope.

Hope is what gave Alice her resiliency, her vibrancy, her 90 years of buoyancy, her expectation of goodness….. that twinkle in her eye. Even when she wasn’t happy, Alice knew joy. Even when she wasn’t optimistic, Alice knew hope.

I called Alice when I heard about the cancer and she said with her usual directness, “This is not good. It’s not going to end well. There’s nothing that can be done.” But it was never said in a tone of dismay or defeat, but rather in just naming life as straight up as she could name it. Yes, she was sad, but not bitter. She had her family and that’s what mattered. She could rely on them.

Hope is not optimism or an emptiness longing to be fulfilled, ***but rather hope is a fullness longing for relationship***. She loved you. You were everything to her. And she wanted to be in relationship, through it all, the ups and the downs.

That’s one of the reasons it was so important to her that her children and family surrounded her as she passed from this life to the next. She came into this world believing in community and she wanted to leave this world believing in community. Which she did, surrounded by her three children as she took her last breath.

We all long to be connected with each other and integrated- to be able to act as we think, feel, and desire. Not to be second guessing ourselves, but rather just to be!

This kind of Love is the home of everlasting life. The bridge between heaven and earth. You have to trust that this relationship with Alice, as your mother, your grandmother, aunt, your neighbor and your friend has no end.

This is what we mean by the Hope of Heaven.

Alice, whom you loved deeply and who loved you, has died, yes, yet not…… because she lives on in you, not just as memories, but as Real Presence, as real as the bread and wine that Alice took weekly in communion.

Jesus is pointing to this reality: there are many mansions, beyond this life, dwelling places for us to experience the glory of life everlasting. Jesus has prepared these eternal places for each individual, specially crafted for you. Imagine that. And by the way, you, all of us, will know the way to get there.

"How can that be," asks Thomas. "We don't know where you are going, nor do we know the way."

Oh, but we do; the way is encoded in each one of us by the gift of God's love and hope in us. God has drawn a map into the very sinews of our being. We know how to return home. And we carry this return in our back pocket. We sometimes forget, but today, together, we take this opportunity to remember. Alice is living in the fullness of God’s mansion for her life, as an extension of life, not as an end.

Today, we not only celebrate the life of Alice, and give thanks that she was in our lives, but we are also taking this precious time this afternoon as her loved ones to reAlice that a Glory, we can only imagine, too deep to be grasped in images or words or even concepts, is now Alice’s reality, her essence, her joy. The spark of God, this deep, deep thing that is so elusive for all of us is now Alice’s full reality. Looking directly into the full sun, Alice can see the Light. AMEN