

Paula Joan von Hoorn-Pellino Memorial Service ~ December 15, 2011~ A homily preached by The Rev'd Erl G. Purnell at Old St. Andrew's Church, Bloomfield, CT

Isaiah 40.27-31; Psalm 23; Revelation 7.9-17; John 6.37-40



In John's Gospel, Jesus says that at the end those who die are raised up. This notion is especially poignant on the day we celebrate Paula's life—a life that was too short and a life characterized by extraordinary courage in the face of the scourge of M.S.

Paula was excited to reach her 46<sup>th</sup> birthday in September. By current standards, 46 is the prime of life, not a time to die. Yet, Paula lived her whole life. Her whole life was 46 years; not 86. Surely our focus should be on the time she had with us, not what will never be. In those 46 years, she was a blessing, a very beautiful blessing to those who knew her.

Although I had spoken with Paula dozens of times on the phone over the years, I only met her face to face about 6 weeks ago. Right away, I, like most of you, was immediately captivated by her. She had a charisma and a smile in her eyes that made me, made you, take a breath.

We don't get to choose our bodies when we come into this world, do we? Sadly, M.S. turned Paula's into a battle ground between dignity and disability. Some might think that disability won, but that's not true. Just think how much Paula taught the rest of us from the pulpit of her slowly deteriorating body—first the wobbly walking, then the cane, the walker, and finally the joystick-driven wheelchair.

Of course she was angry about having M.S. and being stuck in the wheelchair. But none of the difficulty was about Paula; it was about that horrible disease. Though not easy, in fact hard as hell for her and her family, Paula persisted gallantly. You see, her dysfunctional body was only a shell; make no mistake, her indomitable spirit was the definitive Paula.

Paula told me that sometimes she had been scared, mostly scared to be completely debilitated. But in the end she assured me she wasn't scared at all. She was very much at peace.

Much of her life had been a true joy—her art as a hairdresser, gardening, working at Miner's, cooking, Christmas and getting the tree from Stedman's in New Hartford. She loved Dan and especially adored her Sarah and Cat.

While Paula's faith may not have been the church kind, there's no doubt about her understanding and embracing the Christ message of forgiveness and reconciliation. She was deeply spiritual and faithful to God ... as she knew God.

In all of this and to paraphrase the apostle Paul, Paula fought the good fight, she kept the faith, she finished the race ... and she did so with grace, dignity, and integrity. The flowers she so loved to plant and care for on the deck are now garlands in her hair as she gallops barefoot across the emerald grass of eternal joy.

Indeed Paula, you have been a very beautiful person and we'll miss you dearly. Thank you for being you. Blessings & Peace Paula. Godspeed. Godspeed.

*Amen.*

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