

The Rev. Kate Byrd
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Celebration of the Life of Helen Pegg

If I had one word to describe Helen, based on what I know of her and more so what I have heard and witnessed with all of you, it would be a friend. Helen is the kind of person who enveloped you like a dear and long time friend whether you had just met her once or known her for a lifetime. Helen had the kind of presence that made you feel at home and a spirit that was one of abundant joy and selfless giving. Even as I visited Helen at the Hospice House she greeted me with the warmest and sweetest smile, immediately inquiring about my toddler twin boys, wondering if I would bring them by for her to see and enjoy. And, as her family and friends sat around her bed in those final hours, with her beloved four legged companion, Molly, perched on her lap, they shared with me the stories of her friendships. From her home town in Maryland where she and Alan met, married, and raised their two children Jennifer and Todd, to here in North Carolina where they were enveloped into not one but two new communities, in Pittsboro and Clayton. As Helen continued gathering and tending to more and more friends, like the flowers in her beloved garden, caring for them, cultivating them, enjoying and loving them. From chatting with neighbors who passed by as she tended to those same beautiful blooms, to her travels with family and friends, and especially her girls trips with her daughter Jennifer (a few of those being to Vegas, I heard). Helen was intentional and dedicated to making space and time in her life to be with those whom she loved, bringing them in close, relishing and sharing with them, which is all of you, in the delights of this world and especially the wonders of God's beautiful and magnificent creation.

In our passage from John this afternoon, we find Jesus responding to a crowd overcome with the desire for him to show them a sign. Something that will prove to them that he, Jesus, is indeed sent from God. Like Moses before him, they are asking for proof that he is there to save them, to feed them, to give them what they want and desire. In response Jesus tells them "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." Going on, as we just heard, Jesus tells them, "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day." While the crowds are looking for a sign of proof, like a magic trick that evokes awe and wonder or a prize that can be displayed and shown off. Jesus offers them something more miraculous and valuable than they could ever imagine, as he offers himself. His presence to be the balm that will soothe their anxieties, his life to be the manna from heaven that will feed their souls, his spirit to be the eternal gift that will allow them to know, and find, and share in salvation both here and now on this earthly plane and there and then in that heavenly one.

The memories we hold and have of Helen inform the person we know her to be, the friend who tended to us like her garden, the mother who encouraged and pushed us to be our best, the life long companion who was always by our side. In our Epsicopal theology and even in our liturgy (as you will hear in a moment) we uphold the belief that in death life has not ended, only changed. Helen may no longer tend to her flowers, or board a plane to fly off to Vegas, we may no longer be able to hold her tender hand or see that sweet smile, but she is still with us. And, the signs, we will find, are all around us. We may find them in the splendor of a blooming flower, the breathtaking landscape of God's almighty creation, or the warmth of a smile that comes from reminiscing over fond memories. Either way, her life is a gift and sign of God's love, presence, and devotion because it is a reminder of the way we can be present to one another. In all the ways we enjoy each other, in all the ways in marvel in God's creation, in all the ways we savor this one life. And especially in all the ways we remember that all God has given us is all God gave to Christ and even more so all that God will raise up! Reminding us that life has not ended, only changed, and we will continue in that change, until we are reunited with Christ, with one another, and with Helen, on the last day.