

**Homily for Nancy Schmidt**  
**Rev. Devon Anderson**  
**September 23, 2018**

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It was a Wednesday when I received the call from Craig Schmidt: Nancy had entered hospice, could I come by the house? They wanted to talk with me. It took a while to rearrange my schedule, get my kid home from school, and sign out at the office. By the time I got on the road, it was the beginning of twilight. I drove west, past Excelsior, past Victoria, past the new pop-up BBQ place on Hwy 7. I took a right at Mackenthun's Meat and Deli, through St. Boni, and then, as if with a sigh of relief, out into the gorgeous expanse of farm land. I couldn't help but feel overcome by the stunning beauty of the place Nancy called home for her entire adult life. It was twilight, the sun was setting and casting her warm glow on white barns, turning them orange. It was twilight, and long shadows extended across fields, as crops swayed together in the wind, rippling like waves of the ocean.

Once there, we had a grand time. Nancy, by then in her hospital bed next to the big bay window in the front of their house, was in fine form. Weakened, but entirely herself – Nancy was full of stories, and instructions, reminiscing about her mother's years playing the organ at St. Luke's in Minneapolis, the time she and Craig first met, grandchildren antics, the annual St. Boni community garage sale. "I've always wanted Trinity to do something like that," she said, "a huge garage sale." She sent Craig into the dining room, and from her bed hollered directions to him on where to find the family picture she wanted to see that would perfectly illustrate her story. "Just don't send me into the sewing room," Craig hollered back. We went over her funeral instructions, planned down to the T – I told her she'd be my personal Yoda from that day forth, such a model to others for how to leave behind final wishes all parsed out, so when the time came, her family would not have to spin and suffer trying to guess what she would have wanted.

I drank in our time together. I had been waiting to talk with Nancy, to really talk, for three years, from the moment she was first diagnosed with uterine cancer. In the first few years Nancy rebuffed my overtures to provide pastoral care. After many attempts on my part to be a good pastor and try to connect, she finally called me on the phone, and in her pragmatic way said, "Look – I'm fine. I have cancer, but I'm doing my treatments, and I'm going to work, and I'm living my life. I'm not trying to hide my cancer, I just don't want it to be the only conversation everywhere I go. And I don't want to have to take care of people who feel bad that I have cancer." Fair enough. Nancy had work to do, a house to run, sewing projects to finish, UofM games to attend, church anthems to sing, grandchildren to love. It's been said that we "die as we live," and Nancy was the truest embodiment of that idea.

Less than 24 hours after our visit, Craig called again. It was a little after 8:00 pm – Nancy had died, with Craig by her side, in the house she loved so very much. Again, I got in my car and drove out.

Again, it was twilight, though a different part of twilight. No orange barns this time. The sun had sunk below the horizon leaving in its place dark hues of blue and purple fading into black. Now the stars were coming out, and all the earth was hushed. No wind. Just quiet, and the long headlights cast on the county highway by a lone truck coming from the opposite direction.

Tiffany was at the house, and we waited for Erik to arrive before we stood around Nancy and said the final prayers for a departed soul. So peaceful. So much loss. Nancy loved her family deeply and fiercely, without reserve. And that love hung in the air and hugged those three like a coat. There will never be anyone quite like her.

A few days later, for a third time I went to the house, this time Calvin and Katherine were there, and later Molly, this time to walk through the service and put into motion what Nancy had hoped for on this day. Again, a third time, it was the beginning of twilight. We talked about Nancy's final moments. Tiffany told me about when the Cremation Society came to retrieve Nancy's body, and how Tiffany and Kurt had decided to include their children in witnessing that rite of passage. Death is part of living. It just is. And this is what it looks like. I cannot tell you how much I respect Nancy and Craig's parenting of Tiffany and Erik, and how much I see their practical and perceptive approach reflected in Tiffany and Kurt's parenting – the next generation of children who know about life and death, aren't afraid to ask questions, who know, even before they can speak the words, about the graceful power of family and community.

Even though Nancy suffered from cancer for 3 long years, enduring 9 aggressive chemotherapy treatments, her ultimate death came hard and surprisingly fast. It was almost in a blink of an eye -- in three twilights – we moved from yucking it up in the family room to telling stories about the kids watching strangers take their grandmother away. Three twilights.

The poet and theologian John O'Donohue asserts that “twilight is the most elegant style of leave-taking. What do we know in nature,” he writes, “that leaves or departs with such elegance and beauty of valediction as a twilight? Because the day, from the first blush of dawn, is carried everywhere by light. Time unfolds in light. And the transparency puts the day out into the open, and there's no place else for the day to hide. And it's almost as if at evening time, when the light is departing, that it's somehow not sure that it will be returning. It's as if it wants to remember and recall every object it illuminated during the day. And it goes deeper into the white light and brings out the hidden color of the heart of light and turns on every lamp of color so that we get this huge vista of grandeur. It's amazing that a twilight is so silent because it has the grandeur of music.”

It's fitting Nancy died in the twilight. Twilight is the threshold between day and night. It's the place where the “beauty of color runs into the finality of darkness...where darkness and light are in a beautiful conversation with each other,” one giving way to the other, and then back again. Nancy's beauty, both in life and in her death, glimmered like a slow twilight where the full force of each color came alive and

yet blended with the other colors to create a new kind of light. Nancy's is a new kind of light, now. One that has taken its rightful place with the light of God in heaven, a light that shall never again be overcome by darkness, the light of perpetual freedom and joy and love.

What an honor she gave those of us she allowed to stand with her on that threshold. To Craig, Tiffany and Erik – the loves of Nancy's life – you are brave, you are loving, you are faithful. Your lights shone so incredibly bright as you helped Nancy through her suffering. You never gave up. And all of us here, gathered today around you, can be assured of the hope and redemption and love of God because we watched it be lived out in your love for Nancy. AMEN.