

TODAY

*Today I'm flying low and I'm
not saying a word.
I'm letting all of the voodooes of ambition sleep.*

*The world goes on as it must,
the bees in the garden rumbling a little,
the fish leaping, the gnats getting eaten.
And so forth.*

*But I'm taking the day off.
Quiet as a feather.
I hardly move though really I'm traveling
a terrific distance.*

*Stillness. One of the doors
into the temple.*

As this poem from Mary Oliver's collection entitled "A Thousand Mornings" suggests – today we are flying low. Today we take the day off and are quiet. Today we are still and focused, as we come together to remember and celebrate the life of Elaine Arndt. Through our stillness, through our pause, through our worship and our memory, we stand at the threshold of the door through which Elaine moved this past Wednesday afternoon – into the world beyond, into the waiting arms of God, into the company of her husband and those loved ones who have passed over the threshold before her.

It may sound like a weird thing to say, but Elaine's was a lovely death. Our priest associate here at Trinity always says that we "die as we live." Elaine lived life as a graceful, peaceful person, and her death was similarly graceful and peaceful – quick, surprising even, surrounded by her family squeezing her hands and reading psalms and blessing her and reminding her how deeply she is loved. She wasn't in pain. She didn't seem upset or scared. She just drifted away, surrounded by the deepest and most devoted kind of love, into the mystery that is God, to the place we trust is heaven.

I will miss Elaine. I will miss watching her glide into Sunday worship each week – *always* a few minutes late, slipping in behind the procession to her favorite perch on the right side of the sanctuary. She was always smiling, she was always quiet and kind. And she was always carefully dressed, never over the top but respectful, intentional. Church was important – something one dresses for.

She was also a big reader, swapping books with her daughter Sue and friends at Trinity’s Wednesday Women. This was how Elaine and I connected: “What are you reading right now?” I’d ask her. And she’d give me a book review or two. She loved a good story, well told.

Elaine was a wife, mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother. And she loved her family fiercely, as we will hear about in a moment. As her priest, what I most honor about Elaine is her long life well lived, filled with millions of ordinary, simple moments – caring for her family, raising children, cooking beautiful food, baking her famed chocolate chip cookies, celebrating holidays, growing lilies and tending gardens, indulging the arts.

And through Elaine I am reminded, too, that each of our lives are made up of millions of ordinary, simple moments such as these. But we are really living if we are somehow able to recognize in these ordinary, simple moments the presence of exceptional grace and kindness, connection and care when they present themselves. These gifts are of the kind that so often get overlooked as we zoom around our lives from one event to the other. But our capacity to see, understand, appreciate, and give thanks for them – in all essence -- determines the quality of our lives.

How lucky we all are to have had our lives enriched and deepened because we knew Elaine. There’s a picture book that sits in my office called “Lifetimes: The Beautiful Way to Explain Death to Children.” I have given away more copies than I can count, because it is as meaningful for adults as it is for children. It’s not a Christian book, so it doesn’t include the great themes of hope and resurrection. But its teaching is universal: *There is a beginning and an ending for everything that is alive. In between is living.*

We don't know much about our beginnings and our endings. We don't know *anything* of where we were before we were born, and where we go after we die. All that we are conscious of is our brief time in this world, this earthly garden with all its glories and its heartbreak. All we are conscious of is, as Carl Jung said, "the luminous pause between two great mysteries," the luminous pause that is living.

We are, each of us, "middle people," living today in this moment between the two great mysteries of birth and death. For each of us there are people that walk the way with us – family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, parishioners. They are there to teach us important lessons about what the luminous pause means -- what it means do our living with gusto - fully and gracefully and with purpose. Elaine was a guide to good living for so many of us. She taught us about what is important in living, and what is not. She had the particular gift of graceful kindness, the kind that gets lost if you're not lucky enough to be paying attention.

So today, as the poem goes, we are "flying low," "quiet as a feather," as we pause in stillness and attention to give thanks for Elaine -- to celebrate the choices she made and the life she lived during the luminous pause between the two great mysteries. Though we will laud her accomplishments and what she *did*, much more importantly than that we will raise up who she *was* and how she made us feel. We will remember the millions of small, ordinary moments that, gathered up together, made a life of some 87 well-lived years, and we will give thanks to God who made it all possible.

Let us pray. *Today we give Elaine back to you, O God, who first gave Elaine to us; as you did not lose her in the giving, we do not lose her in her return. Amen.*