**Reflections for Jan Blake’s Memorial Service**

By The Rev. Christopher Wendell

Rector, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

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I’m so honored to be here this morning sharing with you in this celebration of Jan’s life. I feel very humbled to be standing here at this pulpit and near this altar where Jan worshipped for over fifty years of her life. Though I only knew Jan as her health declined in the final three and half years of her life, I still think of her as an energetic person, curious and lively until all but the very last couple of visits we had. Jan loved her family, and she loved to talk about you with me. Then she would ask me about St. Paul's. Her eyes would light up whenever I talked about what was going on around church, or showed her a picture of a parish event. She was genuinely committed to being sure I knew that she cared about Don, her children, about God, and about St. Paul’s.

The ancient desert monks from the 3rd century have an old saying: “Go to your cell and stay there, and your cell will teach you everything.” Now, I don’t think anyone would ever confuse Jan for a 3rd century monk. Jan was about as far from being a monk as it is possible for a person to be. I don’t think monks are allowed to use some of the words Jan often used – particularly when she was frustrated or angry. But as I was thinking about Jan’s life a bit this week, these were the words that came into my heart. Because Jan understood something about the virtues of staying in one place for a long time. Living in one house and worshipping at one altar for five decades. Learning what the place you have chosen has to teach you, even if the lessons are sometimes hard to grasp or a long time in coming.

I particularly noticed Jan’s willingness to embrace this way of being when she finally moved out of Bedford to Life Care in Acton – which was not her favorite place to be. It was a challenging time for her, living apart from Don for the first time. Living away from Bedford after half a century here. Being in an unfamiliar setting. But despite the challenges, she still would talk with me on what she was learning about herself there. She liked to talk about how she was trying to make sense of the progress of her disease. And about how she could be kinder to her very difficult roommate. And about how she could be a better mother to her grown children. And about how she could get closer to God. I was so impressed by this continued desire to grow as a person. Even in her final years she was still learning from the place where she was, and trying to grow through that learning.

If Gleason Road was the primary place where Jan was in her life, St. Paul’s was a very close second. Jan knew personally every rector who ever served this parish – and wasn’t shy in sharing her opinions about them with me! Jan was blessed to have many years to learn from this special place, from you special people, from this special church. And as she learned the lessons of this place -- lessons of welcome, comfort and strength -- she offered her gifts to many of us in this room. We’ve heard about some of them from Douglass and Jan Gurley. I’m sure many of us here today can think of a gift that Jan gave us. Something she taught us, here in this place she loved so much.

It is of course natural, for those of us who knew and loved Jan, who were fortunate enough to receive some of her gifts, to grieve her death. Even when it comes after a long illness and is, as Paul writes in the second letter to the Corinthians, something of a release from a body that has become cumbersome – nevertheless, the death of a loved one still brings a kind of appropriate sadness with it. After all, when it comes someone we love, no matter how simple or how complicated that love is, I’m not sure we’re ever really ready for the conversation to be finished.

The good news is that our conversation with Jan isn’t over, it’s just different. As people of faith, we believe that death is not the end of life. It is simply the transition point from one kind of life to a new kind of life. From earthly life to eternal life.

Now I think of eternal life not so much as a place where you go when you’re done being here on earth, but rather as a state of being. Jesus talks about that state of being when he talks about coming to live in the Father’s house. Of course, God doesn’t really have a physical house. That’s not what Jesus means. What Jesus is getting at here is that in death we come to embody perfect union with God. Just as God was fully in Jesus, when we die, we become fully united with God, fully a part of the love and compassion and forgiveness and healing that rests at the center of the universe.

This is what it means to live in eternal life, entering into that perfect state of love, compassion, forgiveness and healing -- much so that your own being radiates the love and compassion and service and grace of the Divine.

All of us have partial experiences of this eternal life while we are still on earth – in those moments when our lives or the lives of others shine forth with the compassion, love and service of God. Your life does at times. My life does at times. Jan’s life did too. In fact, our whole lives, in some way, are a journey of growth to becoming more and more the creatures of perfect love that God hopes we will become. This is whole point of faith and of religion: to become a more perfect lover -- of ourselves, of each other, of the world, and of God.

The bad news is: we never fully get there this side of the grave. We all have our flaws, imperfections, inadequacies and areas for further growth. The good news is God knows all this, and loves us anyway. When we die, God picks each one of us up carries us the rest of the way home – into the state of perfect love, perfect compassion, perfect forgiveness and perfect healing, where our souls rest for all eternity. Jan got pretty far in that journey. She was blessed to have many years in which to grow in love – even if, at times, that growth came by taking two steps forward and one step back, as it so often does for all of us. We know that now God has carried her the rest of the way, brought her soul into the very center of Christ’s perfect love that shapes the universe. This is a cause for great celebration, even alongside our sadness, not just today, but in the weeks and months ahead.

Let us pray,

*O God, whose days are without end, and whose mercies cannot be numbered: Make us, we pray, deeply aware of the shortness and uncertainty of human life; and let your Holy Spirit lead us in holiness and righteousness all our days; that, when we shall have served you in our generation, we may be gathered to our ancestors, having the testimony of a good conscience, in the communion of the whole Church, in the confidence of a certain faith, in the comfort of a religious and holy hope, in favor with you, our God, and in perfect charity with the world. All this we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*