

“Serenity Now!”

Funeral Service for Dolly Jacobs

August 15, 2021

Almighty God, Eternal Presence, Everlasting Arms, in your mercy and power today transform these so very human words, these scratchings with ballpoint pen on a legal pad, into the very words we need to hear this morning in this time of grief, loss, and bewilderment. Amen

Bill has asked me to tell Dolly’s story. I’ll do my best. But really everyone here today whether you are in the sanctuary or with us at home or will be with us later watching the recording – you all have your own Dolly story. That’s why you are here.

So the best I can do, the only authentic thing I can do, is tell you my Dolly story. And invite you to in the days ahead tell your own Dolly stories as they rise up inside you like Mardi Gras balloons of purple and gold and green.

We started our ministries here in the summer of 2003. She was thirty-one years old, just graduated from Austin Theological Seminary. I was forty-six, the old guy with twenty years of experience and two kids in college.

Dolly had a wonderful totally convincing belief in God’s enfolding love. She knew how to help people lean in the everlasting arms, safe and secure from all alarm.

If I had to choose one Biblical truth she lived and shared the best, it is the loving arms of God, the comforting Presence. Only God knows how many people she helped through dark or frightening times by assuring them of that amazing comfort.

She had the great gift that few pastors have of approachability. You could be real and vulnerable with her, and you knew she would not judge and would understand.

She had a wonderful way of smiling with her lips pursed and looking right at you that always communicated – you are loved, you are understood, we will get through this together.

If I needed to be reassured of God’s loving presence—but to tell it real and true with no magical thinking or syrupy sentimentalism —Dolly was my best choice.

If I needed to confide in someone, to seek understanding and support —Dolly was my best choice.

If I needed to enlist the troops to solve a problem I could not handle on my own — Dolly was my best choice. She was really, really good at these things – always my best choice.

Dolly was very action oriented —what can I bring you? What can I organize? Who can I call? What do you need? How can I help?

She gave this congregation all she had. She dove right in the deep end and never stopped swimming for all of us.

She had a great loyalty and love for her family and friends, but she was always a pastor. Her life was not compartmentalized. I'd get texts at odd times that went some like this — “Hey, I'm at Sydney's volleyball tournament in Charlotte and I found out so and so is in the hospital. Just letting you know.” Or “Hey, we're at the beach but it just popped into my head that someone needs to check on so and so. Can you do it?”

After working together for eighteen years, it is not surprising that we developed some non-verbal communication and favorite code language.

Our favorite one was “Serenity Now!” from a famous Seinfeld episode. Frank Kastanza, always uptight, neurotic and nervous tries to obtain inner peace by yelling — “Serenity Now!”

Whenever things got weird at church, we'd just look at each other and mouth the words —Serenity Now! Or text them to each other. It was our way of finding humor in the drama of church life. And perhaps often so many years of experience, it was our way of reminding each other that we have seen this behavior before, and we will get through it.

Serenity Now!

Dolly gave us all the gift of presenting herself as a work in progress. She was refreshingly honest about what she was not good at or needed to work on. I think this helped all of us be more honest about our own flaws and weaknesses and work on them faithfully as Dolly did.

I remember like it was yesterday the first time I met with Sid during my interview process, and he told me about Dolly. He said, “She's a breath of fresh air!”

Eighteen years later she maintained that freshness, that vitality, that spark and joy and fun. Always a breath of fresh air!

In the Rejoice! service she developed the liturgical movement of pouring water into a baptismal basin at the Assurance of Pardon. Reminding us of the connection between cleansing water and forgiveness of sins.

She did it so well, so gracefully, so wonderfully, that when it was my time, I always skipped that part. I knew I couldn't do it like Dolly could. I'd mess it up and leave people confused or unconvinced.

I will continue to skip that part, my little boycott in honor of Dolly.

There is no Serenity Now. We are still in grief. Even shock. I'm grateful to Bill for wisely deciding to wait two weeks to have this service. I could not have shared this sermon two weeks ago.

We all have our Dolly stories. They will arise within us for a long time and in their own time. Sometimes they will pour out and gush forth like a river full of rainwater. Other times they will well up inside us like cool clear water from a spring deep in the earth. They will cool us off and quench our thirst. They will be like old wine and sometime like new wine. These memories will be our balm in Gilead, our Rose of Sharon. Sometimes we will laugh. Sometimes we will cry.

Our stories, our unique, wonderful, cherished Dolly stories – they rise up. They are filling up the sanctuary now as I speak. They are the colors of Mardi Gras, the colors of the flowers on the communion table – purple and gold and green – miraculously floating or resting on our necks, remind us of the Everlasting Arms and the Promised Hope of Serenity Now. Amen.