

A Service of Witness to the Resurrection
and Thanksgiving for the Life of Catherine Taylor “Kate” Jones
April 12, 2001 - February 17, 2018

First Presbyterian Church of Athens
February 20, 2018

Three Good Things

Texts: Psalm 23, Psalm 139:1-12, I Corinthians 13:1-8; 15:50, 53-55, 57

All of you share a blessing which I unfortunately do not. You knew and loved Kate. After hearing about this young woman, I wish I had had the chance. She was, no doubt, remarkable. I cannot thank her friends enough for sharing memories and her family, as we have visited. Kate was indeed a beautiful girl, inside and out.

Kate lived and died going full tilt, ever among friends, taking risks-- a wonderful, full-of-life child of God literally buried this day in her Adidas Boosts. The hole she leaves is big and ragged and the pain, deep. I know you already miss her more ways than words can say, and I honor your grief.

In the face of Kate’s death there are things which should never be said. Among them, “It was God’s will.” It is never God’s will that tragedy happen. God does not cause vehicles to roll into lakes, cancer to grow, or hurricanes to land. We live in a world where disasters strike indiscriminately, diseases kill, and accidents happen. They are accidents—unintended by those involved and certainly unintended by God. Kate’s death was not God’s will. And no variation of this misunderstanding should be uttered, like “God needed another angel in heaven,” or “It happened for a reason,” or “It was her time.” When Kate died, God’s heart was the first to break.

What then can we say in the face of this awful tragedy? Three things, three good things.

First, we can say, Thank you. Thank you, God, for Kate. She was a gift. She made the world a better place for having lived in it. Indeed, we can say, Thank you, God, for life itself. We too often take it for granted. When it’s gone, we realize how precious it is, especially when it is a young person who dies. But the fact that life for all of us is limited—at least our days on earth are limited—makes it all the more dear. It’s why we give fresh flowers not artificial ones. We value them precisely because they don’t last forever. So, in gratitude we can say, Thank you.

Secondly, we can say, We are not alone. Especially in the dark times, we are not alone. The psalmist whispers it poetically: “Yea, though I walk through valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” Paul proclaims it loudly: “I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” God--Emmanuel—is always with us. Sometimes God’s presence is invisible, and we do not feel it. Other times it wears flesh and bone. In the face of another tragic death in this family, Kate’s uncle Andrew, the question was asked, “Where is God?” And Kate’s

grandmother Ann wisely answered it. “Look around at all these friends who are here. That’s where God is.” I can say today, Look around at all of you! We are not alone.

And thirdly, we can say that death does not have the final word. The title of this service is, “A Witness to the Resurrection.” We are Easter people. We are people who look to a God who brings healing out of hurt, newness out of brokenness, life out of death. Bad things do happen, but they do not have the last say. God, who knit us together in our mother’s womb, is a master weaver. Chance, free will, and the laws of nature can inject dark and tangled threads into our tapestry. But God comes along with her shuttle of goodness and mercy and can weave something beautiful out of our mess. Kate’s life on earth is over. She was like a bright meteor that arced across our sky. But that’s not all she wrote. There’s more. It’s a good thing Kate’s got her running shoes on! There is more for Kate and for us. Death doesn’t have the last say. God does. Death is swallowed up in victory. God’s love trumps all. And love never ends. Amen.

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