

Funeral Homily
A Sermon Preached by Frank Mansell III
John Knox Presbyterian Church – Indianapolis, Indiana
April 3, 2017

Jackie Kalsbeck (1932-2017)

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8

Psalms 139: 7-16, 23-24

John 14: 1-6

I think it's safe to say we are all still somewhat stunned that we are gathered here today. It was just over three weeks ago that we came together in this space to celebrate the life of John Kalsbeck. The family members had travelled from great distance to be here, to support Jackie in her loss, and to give thanks to God for a life well-lived. Little did any of us expect that just eight days later, and twelve days after John died, that Jackie would join him in the church triumphant.

We know that life is not forever. We realize that our time on this earth is limited. Our heads tell us to accept that fact of life. But our hearts nevertheless ache when we have to say goodbye. We struggle with anguish, grief, and sadness when someone who we cared for so deeply is no longer with us. And in this case, our grief is made more intense by the short time that has passed between the deaths of two incredible people who meant so much to so many of us.

And yet, if there ever were two people who were so intricately tied together as husband and wife, it was John and Jackie Kalsbeck. For more than fifty-seven years, they shared a love that raised three amazing children, touched the lives of thousands of people through their careers and service to this community, and exhibited a faith that shined the light of Christ throughout this world. In many respects, it probably should not surprise us at all that Jackie entered God's kingdom so soon after John, for they were truly the epitome of what Jesus describes in marriage: "the two shall become one" (Mark 10:8).

The psalmist's words seem particularly appropriate today, not only reminding us of God's all-abiding presence with us, but also for this incredible bond which John and Jackie shared. "Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there" (139:7-8). But it is the psalmist who reminds all of us that our faith is in a Creator who has known who we would be and what we would become from before our very existence. "For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made . . . Your eyes beheld my unformed

substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed” (139:13-14, 16).

The writer of Ecclesiastes speaks to how the time we are given by God in this earthly life is laid out for each of us. Throughout the seasons of our lives, God gives us “a time for every matter under heaven.” And just as there has been for all of us, there were certainly many of these times and seasons in the life of Jackie Kalsbeck. Breaking down and building up; weeping and laughing; mourning and dancing; seeking and losing; life and death (3:1-8) – they are all seasons of life surrounded and infused by God’s grace and love.

As I read through that list, there were definitely a few that stood out to me as it related to how God touched others’ lives through Jackie. God showed others generous hospitality through Jackie Kalsbeck. She loved to bring people together, and she was energized by being in the company of family and friends. She loved to cook, and loved hosting people for dinners, cocktail parties, and of course, their famous New Year’s Eve parties at their home. The holidays were particularly special for Jackie, when all her family would be home and she could cook them their favorite dishes. Valerie recalls spending lots of wonderful hours in the kitchen with her mom when they were snowbound during the Blizzard of 1978!

And in her hospitality, Jackie also shared a great passion for life, and through that passion God helped others feel more alive through her. She and John loved to travel, and they shared that joy with their family and friends. From spending their early-years of marriage in London, to visiting places around this country, to exploring overseas, Jackie developed a love of God’s world. Bill shared about special memories he had of trips to St. Louis and Chicago as children, going to museums and developing a deeper appreciation for art and culture. And Lisa recalled that her mom was always one who didn’t want to miss out on anything – signing-up for activities because others were doing them, and she seemingly was always the last one to bed. Jackie loved life and was determined to live every time and season she was blessed with to its fullest.

I have to admit, when the writer of Ecclesiastes speaks of a time for silence, that wasn’t usually my experience of Jackie! I knew her, and perhaps you did, too, through a time to speak. And in her voice and actions, God showed us great strength, determination, and dare I say, stubbornness(!) through Jackie Kalsbeck. She was a woman of deep character and strong spirit, and through that strength of will she modeled for others high standards and expectations, but all with a great deal of grace. I remember some years ago, Jackie had fallen and broken her pelvis, and her grandson, Adam’s, wedding was not too far off. She was determined to be well enough to make it for that special event – and that will power got her there, to be sure. She wasn’t afraid

to tell you what she thought – believe me, I knew that! But that came out of a desire to understand you, and she respected you most when you were able to articulate your thoughts and feelings in a clear, understandable way.

God made others feel loved through Jackie Kalsbeck. In her vocation as a registered nurse, she brought healing, comfort, and wholeness to those who were broken and hurting. In her calling as a mother and grandmother, she made her children and grandchildren feel loved and cared for through her devotion and mentoring. Through her leadership as a patron of the symphony, she ensured that a great cultural resource in our community was available for future generations to deepen their appreciation of beautiful music. As a teacher, a ruling elder, and a founding member of John Knox Presbyterian Church, Jackie nurtured others' faith in the God she so thoroughly trusted in.

When Jesus says these familiar words from John's Gospel, it is on the night of his betrayal, the night before he would be crucified. As they gather in the upper room together, he knows the fate that awaits him, and he knows the anxiety and concern his disciples are feeling. That is why his words are not only poignant, but also reassuring of God's presence with us, even in times of loss and grief.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places . . . If I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also . . . I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (14:1-6).

There is no question that Jackie has been welcomed into one of those rooms which our Lord has prepared for her, and we will look forward to a glad reunion in the life which is to come.

John and Jackie's grandson, Adam, wrote these words to summarize their life in this world: “As we look back on the love and the life that Jackie shared with us, we are comforted knowing that she is now celebrating the life she so beautifully lived, with the man that she loved the most. We will continue to remember Jackie and John in the manner in which they lived every day of their lives: Together, with God, filled with love and beauty.”

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

Thanks be to God. Amen.