

Mozelle Ilene Williams (1940-2024)

March 2, 2024

Grace Episcopal Church, Muncie

The Rev. Dr. Paul Jacobson, *Rector*

Wisdom 3:1-5, 9

Psalms 23

1 John 3:1-2

John 14:1-6

In the Name of God: Father, Son & Holy Spirit. *Amen.*

Good morning. For those of you who are here for the first time, welcome to Grace Church Parish. My name is Fr. Paul Jacobson, and I have the honor of serving as the Rector of this lovely parish.

We are here today to remember and give thanks for the life of Mozelle Williams. Part of that remembering is done here, in the church where she prayed for so many years. We give thanks to God for Mozie's life by reading Holy Scripture and celebrating the Eucharist. Then, more remembering, and more stories about Mozie in the Parish Hall. It is good for us to be here, and you are most welcome.

Each time someone we care for dies, even when we know that it's coming, we need reminding about what to say. Fortunately, we have places to turn. We can turn to the Scriptures and the Prayer Book for the wisdom of our ancestors in faith. This morning's first reading was from a book attributed to the wisest person ever, King Solomon.

*But the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God,
and no torment will ever touch them.*

*In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, ...
but they are at peace.*

I want us to take a moment – right now – in the middle of all the hustle and bustle of getting everything ready for today. I want us to be still for a moment – breathe deeply and remind yourself that Mozie is at peace. Can you think of any better gift for Mozie than to be, at last, at peace?

Then, more assurances, this time from St. John. *See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.* What we are. Now. There is more, still to be revealed, but what we are, right here and right now, are children of God. This is a gigantic beacon of hope, especially in the midst of struggle. Yes, financial insecurity is painful, and it matters. Yes, serious illness is painful, and it matters.

But these are not the only things that matter. I believe that in the middle of all her pain, Mozie knew, profoundly, that she was already God's child. What comes next we don't yet know, except that, one day, we, along with Mozie, will be like God.

The reading from John's Gospel says a great deal about what we think God is like. *In my Father's house are many dwelling places*. This section of John's Gospel is set at the Last Supper – where Jesus is trying to prepare his friends to deal with his coming death ... and resurrection. Much of what he says is a puzzlement to them. It's often a puzzlement to us. Like some of the things our grandparents said to us – that we didn't understand until years later.

But, here on the eve of his going to the Cross, Jesus is preparing his loved ones for how to deal with life without him. He tries to assure them that he is not abandoning them, but is going to prepare a place for them.

Gently, he explains to them that his death will be a doorway into the dwelling place of eternal life with God – a house with many dwelling places, many rooms.

For me, this is a reminder that the God we worship is a hospitable, expansive God. A God who invites us, and all sorts and conditions of people, into relationship with him. A God who has prepared a dwelling place for each of us.

What about our dwelling places – all those rooms inside us? After all, we are all rather like houses, aren't we? Some of our rooms are open and filled with light – they don't even have doors. Other rooms are more private – open only on special occasions or for special people. And, because we're human, we all have some rooms we hope no one ever sees. Some of those rooms are packed to the rafters with stuff. Others are empty and bare.

Even though we know that what we will become has not yet been revealed, some of us are fortunate enough to have people in our lives who give us a preview – a foretaste – of what life in those heavenly rooms is like; rooms where we are safe, and well, and loved without question.

In getting to know Mozie, and in hearing stories about her, I think she gave to any who would listen a preview of such a dwelling place through her love of language and of books.

As I knew her, Mozie used words sparingly, but to great effect – always underlined by looking straight at me with those sparkly blue eyes. Those of us who are book lovers can render a hearty "Amen" to an aphorism attributed to the Roman orator Cicero (105-43 BCE): "A room without books is like a body without a soul."

I think that one of Mozie's favorite inner rooms was stuffed with words and with books. Consider the map of her life. She was an English major, a speech therapist, a

companion and mentor of students, a student of her own faith who gave a structure to the Christian formation of adults here at Grace. And she was a faithful Daughter of the King.

In the last weeks of her life, I know that some of you had conversations with Mozie about books, some read books to her, others read hymns, others read Psalms.

Many of you gave books to Mozie over time, and at the reception, you will have the opportunity to pass on that gift on to someone else. There are even books in the centerpieces.

If you had to imagine what your dwelling place in God's house might look like, you would be hard pressed to picture anything better than a room full of books with a comfortable chair, a dish of lemon drops, and a cappuccino that never ran dry.

Since we are thinking about books, I want to evoke a fictional character, Dorothea Brook, the heroine of George Eliot's masterpiece, *Middlemarch* (1871). About Dorothea, Eliot wrote this.

"Her full nature spent itself in deeds which left no great name on the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was incalculable. For the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts, and on all those Dorotheas who live faithfully their hidden lives, and rest in unvisited tombs."¹

What we shall be has not yet been revealed, but praise and thanks be to God for Mozelle Williams who has offered to us a glimpse of what might be, so that we can take comfort in the words of the Psalmist: *surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life. And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

May her soul and the souls of all the departed,
through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Amen.

¹ This is a reworking of Eliot's original, from the BBC 1994 dramatization.