

Service for November 15, Gwen.

By Rev. Dr. Don Algeo

Readings

Matthew 5: 3-9

Psalm 23+00

1 Corinthians 15: 3-8; 20-28; 50-57

ANGELS AMONG US Sermon for November 15, 2020

Summary: God's amazing grace.

I read a poem many years ago that described the music of the spheres, and I remember that it ended by saying that the reason we never actually hear the music of the spheres is because we are always hearing it, from the moment we are born until the moment we die. Its beauty is so constant and unending that it fades into the background and we never even appreciate it.

The first sermon I ever gave in this church was, I believe, in 2010 or 2011. The topic of the sermon was something like the subject matter of that poem, about how the world is so full of examples of God's kindness and love for us, that they are so abundant and so commonplace, that we don't even recognize them for what they are.

I used five examples in the sermon as illustrations. The first was grass, good old ordinary and yet extraordinarily beautiful green grass, so abundant that we mow it regularly to cut it back.

The second was rain, the lovely sound of it on our roofs, the relief it brings to the dry earth, the way it cleans the air and leaves everything bright and fresh.

The third was apples, such a delicious and crisp and crunchy and healthy way God invented for the simple task of transferring seed from the tree to the ground.

The fourth was color, that wondrous paint that makes the world beautiful. Gray clouds would still work fine if they were floating across a gray sky, but they would lack the startling beauty they have when floating across a blue sky. God doesn't just give us clouds; God gives us works of heavenly art, for our free enjoyment.

And finally, I talked about eggs, and all the delicious things you can make from eggs because they taste good and bind other things together. God could certainly have devised other means for mother hens to give hatch to baby chicks, or could have made eggs taste like something only chickens could enjoy. But that's not what God did; and therefore we have omelets and cakes and bacon and eggs, all those good things that add so much to the quality of our lives.

And at the end of the sermon, I asked everyone to reflect on what the first letters of those five things spell when you put them together: grass, rain, apples, color and eggs. You got it: grace.

I was reminded of all this a week ago today, last Sunday. At the conclusion of the little study group that gets together every Sunday before service, I went over to assist Gwen in getting up from her chair. But before I could do so, she looked up at me and said: Grass, rain, apples, color and eggs. I remember it spells GRACE, but I don't remember exactly what the point of the sermon was. Can you remind me?" And I started laughing at the wonder that was this wonderful woman, Gwen Hughson,

And given the event of Friday, two days ago, I begin to suspect there may have been something providential in that almost ancient sermon coming to life again in Gwen's mind. Because what I told her was that the sermon was about how God's graces are so close to us and so constantly around us that we forget just how wonderful they are, how we never really and fully appreciate them, unless and until, for some reason, they are taken away.

One of God's greatest graces, to this church, to each of us in it, and to everyone who ever knew her, has now been taken away. And only in its sudden absence can we begin to appreciate that amazing grace, that astonishing beauty of character and spirit that had been living among us, embodied, for all these years.

In the list of Beatitudes that opens Chapter 5 of Matthew's gospel, we find the qualities of character that Jesus sketched out to describe the human nature that would be most comfortable in heaven: the lack of self-pride, a tender and generous heart; an openness to instruction; a desire to come into peaceful relationship with others; an innocence of spirit. As everyone here will testify, Jesus might have created his sketch using Gwen as his model.

The tears that have been flowing since Friday morning are ample testimony to the realization of our loss, of how bright and uplifting and strong a spirit we had among us all these years, often without appreciating it. We certainly do appreciate it now. A beautiful light has been taken from us, and our only consolation is that it now among the brightest stars of heaven.

And so our prayer this morning, Father, is that you help us bear the burden of our loss, and share with her the love that is in each of our hearts for your newest angel, who is now with you and Jesus, in whose name we pray.