

Let us pray: O God, whose mercies cannot be numbered: Accept our prayers on behalf of your servant Rita, and grant her an entrance into the land of light and joy, in the fellowship of your saints; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. *Amen.*

It is never easy – and it should not be easy- to say that final farewell to one we love. Even when we know that death is a release from illness. Even when we know that the person we loved had been lost to us because of illness some time before her actual death. It still hurts. Toni Anderson writes that “pain is a gift. It proves they meant something to us.”¹

Your being here today suggests that Rita and her family meant something to you, as well. Whether it was as a teacher, bridge or golf partner or lover of theater, you shared some of your life with Rita or her family. There was – and there still is – a connection of one child of God to another. Rita was blessed with the gift of teaching in Muncie, Crawfordsville and in the North Montgomery schools. Rita was blessed with one of the named gifts of the spirit in First Corinthians 12 by the Apostle Paul.

Particularly since Jack’s death in 2016, Rita struggled with illness herself. There were days of hope and days of despair for Jerilyn, Jeanine, and Annelies. Days when Rita interacted with them as of old and days where Rita was not the mother they had known. Dementia is among the hardest of illnesses because you know the person from when they were well even as they become, too often, someone you don’t recognize. And you despair as you know that the person you knew is gone forever even as they live on in the body.

Lamentations reflects our cry to God when life turns sour. Our lament is heartfelt, coming from deep within us as we face the unknown and the unknowable. Death becomes a blessing even as we grieve the loss of one who gave us life.

*But this I do call to mind,
Therefore I have hope:
The kindness of the Lord has not ended,
His mercies are not spent.
They are renewed every morning –
Ample is your grace.*

We gather here, in part, because we grieve. We gather here, in part, because we have hope. We have hope that the kindness of the Lord has not- and will not ever- end. God’s love and care for us is most evident to us when our loved one dies and we are surrounded with friends and family. We are surrounded by those who care for us and who grieve with us in our pain and our loss. God walks with us in and through our friends and family who tell us stories of our loved one. Rita is remembered and still alive to us through those remembrances. Relish them and let them bring other memories to mind and Rita will never die.

¹ Toni Anderson in [A Cold Dark Place](#) (2014).

It is never God's intention to bring grief to us, especially the grief of losing our loved ones to death. And yet, we live in an imperfect world where death is certain. And, it is only through dying that we will rise again to live with the Lord in all eternity.

We have echoes of this hope in the reading from the Gospel of John. Lazarus has fallen ill and his sisters Mary and Martha have called out to Jesus to come and save him. By the time Jesus arrives, though, Lazarus has died and been in the tomb for four days.

When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you have been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you asked of him. Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day. Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"

There is the question to each of us: Do you believe this? Do you have hope even in the midst of despair and grief? Dying to this life in order to rise to eternal life. What do you hold onto when the world is crashing all around you?

It can be easy to become mired in your grief. To let your world shrink until all that you can see and feel is loss. But just as Rita and Jack underwent horrible grief in the death of their son, Jeff, and their son-in-law David, they found support in each other and in their community of family and friends. They found comfort in their faith. In the belief that one day they will be reunited with all those whom they loved who preceded them in death. Even in your grief, reach out to your family and friends. Hold them tight, knowing that you are the keepers of the memories until you are reunited with those who you love but no longer see.

Take solace in knowing that Rita is at peace, her mind and other faculties fully restored to her. And take heart that your God is a God of love who walks beside you each and every day and most especially in the dark and lonely times.

Let us pray: Merciful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who is the Resurrection and the Life: Raise us, we humbly pray, from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; that when we depart this life we may rest in him, and at the resurrection receive that blessing which your well-beloved Son shall then pronounce: "Come, you blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world." Grant this, O merciful Father, through Jesus Christ, our Mediator and Redeemer. *Amen.*