

From Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, we read:

I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge---that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:18-19).

Marion knew the love of God and her life and activities evidenced that knowledge. In reading the notes about her life, I was struck by how she served in so many ways: her family, her local and wider church and her community. Whether it was as a loyal and faithful employee at Industrial Combustion Engineers, Inc. for 20 years, or 13 years at Hammond Brass Valve Inc. – or being a Girl Scout leader or PTA President or teaching Sunday School for 30 years or other church committees and functions, Marion was not a sit-at-home-and-eat-bonbons lady. If there was a need, she found a way to be involved. Not to say that she was pushy but she also didn't let others take her to task when she knew what the right thing to do was.

Peggy was kind enough to share a story that really touched me about Marion. Back in the early, early 1960s, and living in northern Indiana, Marion was a Girl Scout Leader and a Girl Scout Neighborhood Organizer. And, the Troop she led included young girls both black and white. And Marion invited them all to her home. Well, as you can imagine, some of the neighbors were not so welcoming and let it be known that they weren't happy about having young black girls in Marion's home or neighborhood. Marion stood up to them and told them it was her house, the black girls were part of her Troop just as much as the white girls, and (in my words) to "get over it." A person of character who was rooted and established in love.

I also imagine that if we at St. John's had known Marion before her memory challenges, she could have cracked the whip, figuratively speaking, at us over knowing Bible Stories. Can you imagine teaching Bible Stories to children and to adults for 30 years! Go, Marion!

I'm grateful that her church recognized Marion for her devotion to her God by awarding her the "Valiant Women of the Year" award in 2001. That award recognizes a woman for her work in her local and wider church as well as to her community and family. The title "Valiant" makes me think about Paul's writing where he tells us to put on the armor of God.

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6:10-18).

Can't you just see Marion fully suited up with the armor of God? What a sight that would be.

We gather today to celebrate the life of one of God's saints on earth. Now, I don't mean that Marion was perfect- she was human just as we are. I'm sure she lost her temper at times or perhaps had some things over her long life that she might have wished differently. But from my experience of her, she was a gentle soul, with a smile each Sunday she was here among us. A smile and grateful receiving of the bread each Sunday – the body of Christ which gives everlasting life to all who believe.

In choosing Scripture passages for this morning, the passage in John about Christ telling us that he is the good shepherd seemed particularly appropriate for Marion. In many ways the time and efforts and causes that she gave her life to reflect being a shepherd of others. She set boundaries or rules for how the household would be run but wasn't about acknowledging when a change or exception was appropriate. She listened to the voice of her Savior, her Shepherd, and structured her life to reflect the values we are taught by Christ. And, I suspect, based upon the Girl Scout story and most likely so many more that the family can share, that she, too, wanted one flock and one shepherd of us all.

One of the tragedies of dementia and other memory challenges is that we, often, know who the person was before the disease robbed them of their memories. And it hurts, terribly, if the time comes when they don't know who we are but we know who they are and were. While we here at St. John's grieve that we didn't know Marion before her memory challenges, we can take comfort that she still wanted to come to church, she still wanted to participate as long as she was able, and she still knew the love of God till the end of her days.

Go in peace, Marion, and know the love of God, now and always. **Amen.**