

Emmy Lu Daly: Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled

A Sermon for Seekers Church

10/26/03

Emmy Lu Daly

Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled

Something has spoken to me in the night,

Burning the tapers of the waning year;

Something has spoken in the night

And told me I must die.

Saying:

To lose the earth you know,

for greater knowing;

To lose the life you have

for greater life;

To leave the friends you loved,

for greater loving;

To find a land more kind than home,

more large than earth –

Whereon the pillars of this earth are founded,

Toward which the conscience of the world is tending –

A wind is rising and the rivers flow.

Thomas Wolfe

Movement Interpretation by Kate Amoss

In this, my very first sermon after 12 years in the Potters' House Faith Community where I was an elder, often a liturgist but never a preacher and after 5 years with Seekers Church, I have chosen a subject that, I expect, often makes people uncomfortable. However, it is something I have been thinking about a lot and because I have been given some very positive insights, I wanted to share these with you, hoping I can make the prospect of death somewhat less frightening.

And may I say right at the start, I am grateful for the presence here today of my Sophia sisters, Dottie Bockstiegel, Sherri, Meade and former Sophian, Eve Tetaz, and my [Living Waters Mission Group](#) – Emily, Marjory, Muriel, Linda and Nancy all of whom have given me encouragement to talk about after death. In addition, I am deeply grateful to Kate for her moving enhancement of Thomas Wolfe's poem. Finally, before I get to the heart of the matter, I want to explain this prayer shawl as well. While on a woman's retreat last year at Kirkridge, led by Tiffany and Marjory, it came time to do "crafts." I resist doing "crafts" will all my will -I do not know how to do it, things never turn out right, (whatever that is). However, there was no way out so with audible complaints

and groans, I persisted. This is the result – with which I am actually pleased. So, as I thought about preaching, I said to myself, go ahead, wear it, you never know what may happen.

It is not surprising that I have allotted more time and attention to the subject of death than some of you may have, since, given a normal life span, I am closer to experiencing it. I have thought a lot about dying as well – and maybe this sermon should have been preceded by one on dying- but the common expression is “death and dying” and so that’s the order I’m following.

I confess that I too, was uncomfortable thinking about death, especially the thought of being in the hands of a traditional funeral director with all that that involves, embalming, and fancy caskets, etc. Most alarming to me was the exorbitant costs of the whole thing.

Two years ago, I took a class on Death and Dying in School of Christian Living class led by Rob Benson and Marjory Bankson. A woman, Beth Knox, came to class and talked to us about an organization, Crossings, that offers another way of dealing with after death. She spoke of a renewal of the practices of the recent past – home wakes, direct care of the body and transporting it to its final resting-place in a family vehicle. Key to Crossings core values (and I quote) “is the belief that dignity and sanctity in after-death care can best be accomplished through the connection of love between the family and their own departed.” My spirits lifted and I became very excited to learn more.

I will go into more detail about the work of Crossings in one of the three parts of my talk today.

First, I want to talk a little about how I feel personally about the end of life, and what my beliefs are about what happens after death. Mind you, I said “my beliefs” because I do not presume to offer any universal truths or theological arguments about what happens to the soul after death – like does it go to heaven or to hell. That is altogether too complex a subject for me to address – and besides, complex thinking is not my strongest gift – being a [clown](#) comes more naturally.

Second, I want to ask your help in making it possible for me to have the after death care that I long for and I will explain some of what that involves. I will not talk about a Memorial Service, which is a different matter.

Third, I hope that by opening up the whole subject, it will become easier for all of you to think about what you might want for yourselves immediately after death. I am sure many of you have living wills and durable powers of attorneys that express your wishes for your dying process. On that point, I hope you will consider attending our mission group, Living Waters’ mini-retreat on the “Five Wishes” next Saturday. We will be working with these documents and will have these forms available should you not have any prepared and will offer some further wishes you may want to consider.

With a deep breath, and much humility, I will start with my thoughts about life after death and what makes it possible for

me to think about death – and after death. My thoughts begin and end with John 14 1-4 where Jesus says: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God and trust in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house; if there were not, I should have told you. I am going now to prepare a place for you, and after I am gone and prepared you a place. I shall return to take you with me; so that where I am you may be too. You know the way to the place where I am going.”

Could there be anything more comforting and reassuring than those promising words? Then with the Resurrection, what is there to fear? I believe this with my whole heart and mind, but it would be arrogant for me to assume that all fear will be gone when the time comes. I will not know if I will be at peace until I am at the threshold. For death remains a mystery; so does life, for that matter. Some lines of the poem are reassuring- “to lose the earth we know for greater knowing, to leave the friends you loved for greater loving.”

Having said all that, I do believe that death is a healing process that allows a gradual completion of all that lies behind and a clear-eyed entrance into whatever may lie ahead. Death is not a call to sleep; it is a call to life and work. Death is not a state – it is not something we suffer – it is something we do. We are led out of the shadow of death into the solemn shadow of life into death. It is the immortal self, laying aside the mortal garment.

Sherri and I saw a painting Thursday at the Women’ Museum by Hollis Siegler titled Kiss the Spirits – Now this is What It’s Really Like (the whole title) which was an artistic outpouring of her experience with breast cancer. The painting was large vertically. A wide wavy white pleated ribbon rose in the

middle from the bottom to the top. The silhouetted figure of a woman appeared at the bottom of the painting where there were houses, trees grass, earthly things. My eyes followed the figure, as she seemed to float, appearing on this side, then the other side of the ribbon, finally reaching the sky where angels were flying through the stars and where she herself now had wings. I said "Yes" – that's 'What It's Really Like' will really be like". (Well, I do not know about the wings). It was a glorious painting, triumphal, joyous painting.

Now to my second point – what kind of care would I like to have for my body immediately after my death, and why I think it is important and how I envision this can be done. First, it does take a family or a community. We will need all our positive energy from wherever you are to take with us in our Crossings. Because I believe it takes some time for the spirit to free itself from the body, I would like to have friends and family who can honor this belief, to participate in my crossing. Billy, Mollie and I attended a Crossings workshop given by Beth few months ago, and we were all excited about what we learned. Billy was hoping to co-sermon with me this morning. He is with me in spirit and I am sure he will have more to say at another time.

Let me back up a little and talk about how Crossings came to be. Some years ago, Beth told us the story of the fatal injury suffered by her 7-year-old daughter as the result of an imploding airbag. She was brain dead and a decision was made to stop life support. Nevertheless, Beth refused to hand over her child to a funeral home and chose, instead, to wash the child's body herself and to take her home. She dressed her and laid her on her bed, placed flowers and candles around the room and she sat and talked to her. She invited relatives, friends and schoolmates to come and be with her daughter. They

came and there was someone in the room around the clock – some singing, some talking, the children bringing pictures and mementos, some sitting quietly. Meanwhile, in the living room, people were having refreshments, talking and sharing. The vigil lasted 3 days. Beth swears- as do others who have had similar experiences – that one can sense and see the gradual release of the spirit from the body. In addition, Crossings has developed practical procedures to make this kind of vigil possible for anyone who desires it, including hands-on help.

In the workshop, we learned about washing the body, ways to keep the mouth and eyes closed, how to dress the body and carry it either to a bed or simple coffin which is filled with dry ice, covered with plastic and then with fabric. I offered to be the corpse (always ready to play a part), for the demonstration of body washing (fully clothed of course. I then was rolled onto a blanket and it took six people to lift me and carry me from a table to the improvised bed (no dry ice). They were astonished at what a “dead weight weighed.” The setting for the vigil, how long a vigil will be, and other details are determined by the family or loved ones. I hope sometime soon Billy, I and others in the church will become a part of a “Caring Circle” that will have the opportunity to offer after death care with all the sanctity and dignity each person deserves.

I have written out how I would like my Crossings to be done the dress I want to wear, the music to be played, poems read and prayers offered. (I always enjoy directing). However, practically speaking, I am not sure a vigil in my apartment would be feasible. My only blood relatives are my daughter, Lianne, who lives in London, and Fritz, who lives in a group home, and a brother and sister-in-law who live in Leisure World.

So, to my final point – and this is where you all come in -or at least I hope you will be willing to look through the door. I hope that some of us will be prepared to learn how, hands on, to guide each other through all that is involved in helping one another through this final step toward the Light. Could we envision a room in our Carroll Street Church where vigils could take place? I hope so. (Many hopes there.)

Living Waters, on December 6, will be showing a video titled “A Family Undertaking” (pun intended, I am sure); it is a very moving story of one family dealing with the death of the grandfather. We will pass out Instructions for a vigil at that time.

So, do not let your hearts be troubled. Fear not, the stone has been rolled away -we have been promised “a land more kind than home, more large than earth, whereon the pillars of this earth

Of this earth are founded.”

raise you up,	And I will
raise you up,	And I will
raise you up	And I will
day	On the last

And I will raise you up

And I will raise you up

And I will raise you up on

the last day.