

Lucia Lloyd's sermon
Memorial service for Lea's granddaughter Sophia
February 27, 2010

Jesus does love the little children. And love is what we are celebrating and sharing here today. Our faith teaches us to look honestly into both sadness and love. Our faith teaches us the truth that each of us is mortal. Whether we die at a young age or die at an old age, each of us is mortal. And that means that each of our earthly relationships is temporary. For each of our relationships, either we die first, and have to leave behind the people we love, or as we get older, we gradually face the deaths of more and more of our friends and relatives; the oldest members of our community attend plenty of funerals. And there is sadness in facing our own death, or the death of someone we love, often deep sadness. What gives us strength in times of sadness is love: the love of our friends, family, and faith community, and the love of God.

Lea, I have confidence in you, in your ability to bear sadness faithfully, and in your ability to love and be loved faithfully. I have confidence in your faith, which enables you to look honestly into both sadness and love. When we talked about your grief you acknowledged the sadness honestly, and said that there was a part of you that felt it would have been easier if Sophia had died when she was expected to, shortly after birth. But when I asked you whether the opposite was true, whether alongside that sadness was a deep gratitude for the four years in which you knew and loved Sophia, your face lit up, even at the same time as your eyes filled with tears. Yes, you said. And you began to talk about pushing her on the swing. About holding her ankles and giving her a big push and watching her laugh and laughing with her, and saying "whee...." And letting go and watching her sail through the air laughing, in the simple pleasure of motion, the simple pleasure of being out in the sunshine and loved by her grandmother. You talked about taking her to St. Mark's Episcopal Church and seeing the wonder in her eyes. Even without understanding the words, it was obvious that she felt the reverence and the holiness of the worship, and that deepened your own appreciation of the reverence and holiness of worship.

You spoke honestly of anger too. But I don't think you will be trapped by anger. You described a writer you heard interviewed on NPR, who was still angry years later

over the death of his daughter at the age of 38, because he felt an injustice had been done. And I remembered a man I know who was still angry at God years later over the death of his wife who died at the age of 58, and told me, “Everyone’s entitled to a full life. And she didn’t get hers.” I wonder whether that is true. It is easy to slip into an attitude in which we think that because we have been born, God owes us a certain number of years on earth. Where do we set that number that we are entitled to? 70 years? 80? 95 and a half? Exactly how much life does God owe us because we have been born? And if we think that God hasn’t paid us the life God owes us, or hasn’t paid our relatives the life God owes them, we are likely to feel God has cheated us. Or that God has failed. Or that a God who hasn’t paid his debt to us cannot exist at all. But I don’t think you will hold onto that anger for years, or that it will hold onto you for years. You saw the sadness in this writer’s sense of injustice, and then you very quietly reflected on how quickly life goes by, how it seems that the years fly by, faster than you can count them. How do we measure these years God gives us? There is a quote that says life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the number of moments that take our breath away.

We are used to thinking in terms of teaching children to become like adults. But Jesus tells us to let the children teach us how to enter the kingdom of heaven. What does Sophia say to us as she looks down on us from heaven? Does she say, “Hold on to your anger, because God has cheated me out of what I was owed?” I don’t think so. I think what she says is something much closer to what the psalm says, “This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it.” Sophia did rejoice in the days the Lord had made. She adored the simple pleasures of eating with gusto, of singing Frere Jacques (even though she didn’t know the words and had a trach in her throat, she enjoyed singing it anyway), she enjoyed pointing to her grandmother and saying “Nanna” over and over because of the sheer delight of being in Lea’s presence. She had moments that took her breath away in the joy of a swing, and the awe of a worship service. And now she is rejoicing fully, free from all suffering and pain, free from the frustrations of disabilities and free from all limitations. She knows how deeply she is loved. She rejoices in God’s love for her. She would tell us, “Jesus loves me, this I know.” She would tell us, “Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world.” She would tell us, “He’s got the whole world in his hand.” She would tell us, “This is the day the

Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.” She looks down on us from heaven and sends her love. She looks down on us from heaven and sends God’s love. I expect what she wants for each of us is to rejoice and to love. Those just so happen to be the things God wants for us too.

Our faith teaches us that our earthly relationships are temporary; and our faith also teaches us that because God is eternal, all love is eternal. As you said when you chose the beautiful verses from Romans, our faith teaches us that even death does not separate us from the love of God.

At our Lenten program on Thursday evening, one of your fellow parishioners mentioned that years ago you said you wanted to know what heaven would look like. I expect it looks a lot like pushing a beloved granddaughter on a swing. You hold onto her ankles for a little while and you love each other and you laugh. But you do not hold onto her forever. When it is time, you let go of her physical body. And she soars, and she laughs with delight at the freedom and the movement. And you laugh with her, because even when you have let go of her body, you feel her joy, and she feels your joy. Even when you have let go of her body you feel her love, and she feels your love, and both of you feel God’s love.