

We gather this morning to remember and honor Ruth Wiley, an amazing individual whose life was marked by numerous accomplishments and accolades, by a life immersed in supporting others, and by a woman of determination and commitment to the people, ideas, and institutions that served a wide variety of constituencies. She was a woman fiercely loyal to her family, to her beloved Skagit County, to her Cougar family throughout the state, and to the faithful members who made up the congregations of St. Paul's and St. Margaret's Episcopal Church. We celebrate the relationships, responsibilities, and privileges that shaped her life: as a daughter, sister, wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, benefactor, leader, and follower of Christ.

Each of you brings your unique memories and experiences that grew out of this relationship with her. Each of you comes today with a personal degree of sadness, a sense of grief at Ruth's passing from this earthly pilgrimage into the land of perpetual light and life. I am confident that each of you will leave this service and the following reception having shared a few smiles and tears, and reconnecting with family members, colleagues, neighbors, and friends. Memorial services have a way of refocusing our attention on the things and people that matter most in our lives and about our own mortality. Despite the sadness and grief that are real and present, we also gather with a sense of joy for a life well lived, a life that helped shape who you are as individuals, and with, from a Christian perspective, the ever-present hope of the resurrection; a hope that allows believers to travel *through* the valley of the shadow of death that Ruth and all those who have gone before have done and into a new realm with all the company of heaven where sorrow and pain are no more, only life everlasting.

We have heard testimonies of Ruth from Peter and Haley. Thank you so much for helping paint a portion of the mosaic of Ruth's life as you have known and experienced it, and for giving us a glimpse of what shaped her full and abundant life. I look forward to joining all of you at the reception to continue the conversation about this amazing, intelligent, and gifted individual and the impact she had on your lives.

I firmly believe that funeral homilies are not the place for deep theological treatises or over-sentimentalized trips down memory lane. Instead, they offer not only a

time to remember but, when offered within the context of Christian worship, also serve as a vehicle for sharing the hopeful word of God. The Book of Common Prayer states very clearly that the liturgy we're celebrating today is an Easter liturgy in that 'it finds all its meaning in the resurrection.' Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we, too, shall be raised; this is the reason this liturgy, therefore, is characterized by joy and hope.

For Christians, funerals and memorial services offer more than important snippets of one's life; they remind us that death is not the end. Today's service reminds us that while life has changed for Ruth, it has not ended. She is alive! Today's service reminds us that even as our mortal bodies lie in death, a dwelling place with all the company of heaven is prepared for us. This is the Good News of Easter, and this is Good News for Ruth and us.

The readings we heard today speak of the sovereign nature of God and of the cyclical nature of things, including birth and death, even as we celebrate with certainty that nothing, not anything nor anyone, can separate Ruth or us from the love of God. They serve as underpinnings of faith that sustain us in the present while we await with hope the life to come. St. Paul put it this way: we live between the *now* and *not yet*. Though death may appear to have its way in the here and now, we nonetheless sing our alleluias because we have seen the future, the future of joy and bliss, worship and adoration, wholeness and light in the heavenly habitations with our God. My friends, this is indeed Good News. For Ruth, life is changed, not ended. And that is why on this day, even at the grave, we make our song; Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!