

Trinity Church
May 24, 2008

Funeral: Carole Shewbridge
Isaiah 61:1-3, Romans 8, John 14

A Sermon Preached by The Rev. James C. Ransom

Grace to you and peace from God, our Father, and the Lord, Jesus Christ.

Holy Scripture gives us a very peculiar gift. It is the gift of a dream. Of something at once remembered and fanciful. A unique vision. The seven-day story of creation at the very beginning of the Bible gives us a picture of things coming together at the behest of God's Word and Spirit into a miraculous order of heavens and earth, light and dark, land and sea, creatures and humans, light and dark, whose end is a day of perfect harmony and rest – the sabbath on which God affirmed the creation as very good.

The fabled Garden of Eden continues this theme, picturing a time and place, unknown to us, in which human beings walked hand-in-hand with God in the cool of the evening amid unlabored abundance and a pure heart and mind.

The story of Noah continues this dream in a different context. It is a troubled dream in which sinful rebellion against God has caused the world to fall into dreadful chaos and destruction, but within the Ark, as tiny seeds within a pod, the species of God's devising and the humans of God's calling traverse this chaos in harmonious safety. Within the Ark the reality of Eden's Garden persists. It becomes part of our spiritual DNA. A dream which persists, which haunts our memories, as not only the way things were meant to be, but the stuff of which God's redemption is made.

Medieval theologians called these stories the Dream of Man's Innocency. The modern theologian, Paul Tillich, calls it Dreaming Innocence, and William Blake's poetry and art describe it so tellingly in Songs of Innocence.

Many people find this dream naïve, so naïve in fact that they reject it as unhelpful to anyone who lives in the real world and who must sing Blake's Songs of Experience. Others, and Carole was among them, are fascinated by this glorious memory, and are energized by it, feel called like Noah to build in some small and particular way a place, a moment, a way of being that captures the harmony and peace of that dream.

The prophet Isaiah and Carole would have gotten along! Isaiah was captured by that dream. He is the one who proclaims that there will be a time and a place where the lion and the lamb will lie down together, all enmity will cease, and a little child will lead them, and they will follow. In this day, Isaiah says, when the Spirit of the Lord God is upon us, the brokenhearted will be bound up, captives freed, prisons obsolete, justice will be done, peace will come as the year of the Lord's favor, and grief will pass away. This is not just a hope; Isaiah says, I am here to announce that this is the purpose that God is working out, as the waters cover the sea.

Luke makes it clear in his story of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem's stable where ox and ass and shepherds gather with angels in glory, that the peaceable kingdom has come, and the little child is here to lead us. The child Jesus.

In the synagogue at Nazareth, Jesus read Isaiah 61 and said, "Today, these words are fulfilled in your hearing." The Good News of Jesus Christ is that the Spirit has come upon us to redeem the dream, to set the vision free, to proclaim the peaceable kingdom, to live beyond enmity and

revenge, to embrace forgiveness and new life. To cling in gratitude to this reality even in the midst of suffering and death.

Carole was not only intrigued by the dream, she was captured by the Spirit; she worked to make it real. She saw rescuing animals through the Humane Society in Pagosa Springs as setting the Creation free, one animal at a time. Working with children with delayed development or with other physical and mental challenges was, for her, a way to bring everyone to the table, help everyone into a full life, build a peaceable kingdom in the human heart.

To travel the world from the Galapagos Islands to China's Forbidden City and to see there the riches of creation as the hints of God's glory is to affirm that God's purpose is being worked out as the waters cover the sea.

Now, Carole's remains lie at peace after a long struggle with cancer. They lie under the resurrection light of Christ who proclaimed that in him all things are being made new. Today this candle shines Christ's light over a life completed. Tomorrow, in this church, that same light will be given to Lindsay and Cailin, two of God's children coming to baptism. Our work may end. Carole's witness is complete. But the dream goes on in the divine Spirit that has been given to us. The work, the hard work, of redemption goes on.

And yes – today the dream is fulfilled in your hearing. Amen.