

Anna Delores McDaniel – Requiescat in Pace

Isaiah 55:1-11

Philippians 2:1-11

John 14:1-6

Do you believe that our culture is becoming more narcissistic? Self-interest is as old as the hills, but it does seem that narcissism is in vogue. What is the corrective? Humble people aren't the ones on the magazine covers, they don't have their own show on the tele, and they don't run for president. There's an idiom we used to use that I don't hear too much of anymore: "Good Time Charlie." If someone was a Good Time Charlie, they were generally seen as a carefree and convivial person who was given to frequent pursuit of fun and enjoyment. Does a Good Time Charlie really elevate the company they're in? George W. Bush was elected president because Americans would rather have had a beer with him than the other guy, at least that was the high-brow analysis. The French have their own phrase for a Good Time Charlie – it's Bon Vivant. Bon Vivant literally means "good living." Do you have a mental image of what it is to live well? Most Americans, most people, aspire to live well, don't you think? I imagine that the definition for "living well" is pretty varied. I also suspect that there may be some common denominators in those varied definitions. Did Delores live well?

One of the things that I was charmed to hear about Delores is that she elevated the company that she was in. I don't recall hearing that about too many people. I have no doubt that it is true. But what does it mean? Did Jesus elevate the company that He was in? Well, yeah! Son of God, fount of wisdom, He healed the sick and raised the dead, He turned water into wine, He fed 5000 people one afternoon – it would have been pretty great hanging around Jesus. You know what else He did? He washed His disciples' feet. Every pope since I can remember goes through the same kind of gesture during Holy Week – I'm sorry, it's not the same. Washing people's feet was the job of the lowliest servant in the household. That's because no one wanted to do it. It wasn't pleasant, or sweet, or touching – it was sort of gross and disgusting. They wore sandals, the roads were dirt and had beasts of burden on them (and you know what their exhaust is). Peter wasn't too keen to have his Lord wash his feet. Jesus was adamant: "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me" (John 13:8).

The second reading this morning, the one from Philippians, the later half of that reading is thought to be an early church hymn that Paul simply incorporated into his letter. It's basically about Jesus taking the lowest spot. Ultimately, the lowest spot is a cross outside of Jerusalem. The Lord serves us by taking the lowest spot. The Lord elevates His company by taking the lowest spot. No one could take that spot except Him. True God was made true Man, and that Messianic King came to us for the purpose of taking the lowest spot. All sin was funneled into His person for He was built to bear it. And God punished sin in His Son. Not His Son's sin for Jesus had none. Yours and mine – Jesus took it, bore it, paid for it, died smothered in it. That's the lowest spot. One principal reason that you are in this holy house is because Jesus took the lowest spot and elevated His company. He's the corrective for narcissism.

How deeply do you think that Delores knew all of this? What an intuitive woman! What a faithful woman! What a natural, loving, Christian, servant woman! She elevated those in her company. When someone is a really good basketball player the cherished accolade is this: he

makes those around him better. A family has lost their cherished matriarch. They know that she made them better. Delores wasn't on magazine covers, she wasn't a talking head on tele nor did she run for president, but her spirit is the corrective for a narcissistic age. She was the clay and the Lord was the potter. Delores learned from the Master. His service to her was to wash her feet. She knew it. Baptized, cleansed of her sin, loved and cherished, Delores was comfortable in her Christian skin. Having first received the Lord service, she humbly served others. She was a bible verse in action: "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). Whose company did she elevate more than her husband's? Bill and Delores were married on St. Valentines Day, 1952. Seventy-two years! Square dancing and camping and holiday celebrations – raising children, attending church, and loving each other. As they got older, sorry, as they got *really* older, Bill describes their life this way: "We had each other. We couldn't do much but we had each other and that was enough." Those are the words of a man who has been elevated by the company of his wife.

Delores saw her share of death. One year, this dear lady lost her daughter, her sister, and her mother. Imagine the blow, the heartache, the sense of loss, the empty spot left by the absence of cherished women. How did Delores cope? Where did she flee for consolation? Delores fled to God's Word. That is how the Potter continued to mold Delores into the image of His Son. What she discovered there is that death is defeated, she discovered that life is the victor, that heaven is our home, she discovered grace for each day and how Christ serves the hurting. "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Corinthians 2:9).

What Jesus prepared for Delores was a place in His Father's house. Delores is in elevated company. That is God's intent. It was very near the time when Jesus was arrested, tried, convicted and crucified. The weight, the tension of Good Friday was building and the disciples were troubled. Jesus calms them by shedding heaven's light. "In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. And you know the way to where I am going" (John 14:2-4). Thomas was baffled. Have you ever felt in the dark, theologically? Have you ever been so clouded by concern that you couldn't see the light of Christ. Yeah? Well, that was Thomas. "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" (John 14:5). The Lord made heaven shine brighter as He said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6).

Delores was in elevated company here, because Christ served her here. She loved routine. What is more routine than celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ every Sunday. The Lord elevates all who gather in His name. He said, I am among you as one who serves (Luke 22:27). He takes the lowest spot still. He is the servant in this place and we are His guests, and the crucified and risen King provides His church with a banquet of salvation. I am the way, the truth, and the life, and I joyfully serve you with my death and resurrection. I elevate your company by my humility, my love, and my forgiveness. Delores loved His elevated company, or put another way, Delores loved Christ's church. When she had her stroke there were a number of unhappy repercussions. Unable to serve others was probably at the top. She seemed blue when I first saw her. Her movement was greatly diminished and she attempted to marshal her strength, to

overwhelm her limitations by the force of her will. But she couldn't. Not being in church – that pained her. But marital love bloomed anew, bloomed to a degree that only the very old can perhaps know. Bill gave her a necklace this last Christmas, heart-shaped. Engraved it said: “I loved you then, I love you still, I always have, I always will.” Bill's love elevated her. She told me so. She began to see her stroke as something good in her life.

Delores is home. On January 31st the Lord Christ elevated her to the highest place. Come unto me, all you who are weak and heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28). She bends the knee in Christ's presence, and she knows fully His grace as she has been fully known (1 Corinthians 13:12). Her heart soars. Her soul is enriched with perfect love. Delores knows that she lived well. She lived a life of faith, a life of service, a life that took pleasure in looking after the well-being of others. May we all live so well.