

Requiescat in Pace – Bobbe Monk  
Proverbs 31:10-31  
Revelation 2:8-11  
Matthew 5:1-12

I remember it clearly. A lady in our congregation who was thick in the journalism community, a lady who owned and published the monthly periodical called *Redlands Living Magazine* came to me somewhat breathlessly and said: “Do you know who that is?” The quiet awe in her voice was gripping. I took note of her expression because this is not a woman who was prone to hyperbole or empty infatuation. I replied that no, I didn’t know who she was referring to. This lady, Jane Dreher, had been a staple of our congregation and mindful of who walked in and out of our doors. “That’s Bobbe Monk.” It was as though Jane speaking Bobbe’s name was itself a gesture of praise. I’m not exaggerating. That brief little anecdote captures a lady whose comportment, whose professional weight, whose impact on those around her has had a deep effect, an elevating effect. I remember it clearly.

Years together with Bobbe at Christ the King Lutheran Church would provide the validating substance of Jane’s first remark. My wife has a daily calendar with classic paintings that are contemporized by captions that project what the subjects of the painting are saying to one another. It’s meant to be humorous. Here’s one. An Olde English lady is addressing a man who appears to be overly mindful of his appearance. She says: “I think you’re the biggest narcissist I’ve ever met.” He replies: “So you do think of me!” Is narcissism on the rise? What is narcissism’s corrective? Here’s a quote from the book of Philippians: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others” (Philippians 2:1-4). That is faith. That is Christ’s life invading our own. That is Bobbe Monk.

Christ crucified is the corrective to narcissism. To save us the Son of God emptied Himself, pouring out His blood in obedience to His Father and in love toward us. The eternal Prince of Heaven left His royal throne and took up the form of a servant. It wasn’t play-acting. He laid aside His divine prerogatives and washed His disciples’ feet (John 13:1-17). The power of the cosmos resides in this Messianic King and He allowed Himself to be crowned with thorns. Humility finds its origin, its meaning in a Savior who is pierced to save a wayward creation. We didn’t deserve it. God’s love and God’s love alone is the catalyst for the Lord Jesus to endure the suffering of the cross, the pain of whip, and thorn, and spike. This truth was unleashed in the life of Bobbe Monk. She was elegant. Bobbe radiated dignity and grace and selflessness. Christ’s life was alive in her. She was redeemed by the King of the cross and she knew it. Bobbe was a branch that was connected to the vine of Christ and she bore good fruit, exactly as our Lord promised. He said: “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit” (John 15:5).

The vine bears fruit *through* the branch. The Lord Christ bore fruit *through* Bobbe. We saw it. We benefited from it. It is very much akin to what our Lord says at the beginning of the Sermon

on the Mount, the glorious beatitudes. Those statements of blessedness are best understood as Jesus providing a self-revelation. He is the Blessed One (Romans 9:5). He is the One in whom all virtue finds its origin. And His love, His grace, His blessedness was at work in Bobbe. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3). “Poor in spirit” is synonymous to humility, a humility that isn’t philosophical or inert, but active. Those who are “poor in spirit” recognize their need and lean steadfastly on the One who provides the wealth of His virtue. One who knows that they are the least and yet has been served by the Greatest is eager to serve others without hesitation. Who did Bobbe serve? Paul, Travis, LaVerne, Marlene – this was above and beyond service. She served her employers with dignity, with professionalism and grit. She served Christ the King Lutheran Church with the gifts God had given her. She served her children with love, with encouragement and her presence.

That passage from the book of Revelation, that passage that ends with the memorable line “be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life,” that is a vivid and somewhat troubling passage. Troubling because of the difficulty that the church in Smyrna endured. To endure persecution and remain faithful is a heavy cross to bear. When we suffer, self-pity or a complaining spirit or a latent bitterness can be aroused. Not all of us bear our crosses nobly. Some quit altogether. Some turn inward. Some search for an escape hatch. Bobbe prayed. Bobbe pulled up her big-girl-pants, prayed, and got busy. “Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). There was no grandstanding in Bobbe as she bore her cross. There was no self-aggrandizing in Bobbe as she assisted those around her. Bobbe didn’t let her left hand know what her right hand was doing (Matthew 6:3-4).

Ultimately, the wife of noble character in the book of Proverbs is a reference to Christ’s bride, the church. Our brides wear white in our wedding services as a depiction of the purity which Christ’s blood creates (Ephesians 5:25-27). We were washed in His blood, we have been clothed in His righteousness, we are the bride of Christ (Galatians 3:27). Women of character have the privilege to embody all that is good about the church. Jesus is the bridegroom. He is the one who laid down His life to save His bride. The crucified and risen King is the one who opens heaven. Our sin cast us out. Adam and Eve were pitched out of Eden (Genesis 3:23-24). We have been wandering east of Eden ever since. In Christ’s church we find our home. Bobbe knew that she was at home at Christ the King Lutheran Church – I sensed it in her, a deep appreciation, a love for God’s Word, an awareness that she was embraced by the Lord without qualification.

It is so picturesque to envision Bobbe’s whole life as one of service to others because of the love she first received from the Lord. And she waited for her faith to be consummated fully. Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life. I would suggest to you that Bobbe enjoyed the crown of life while she lived. That’s what serving others is – enjoying the act of reflecting our Lord, following in His footsteps. The crown is *His* life. The love is *His* love.

St. John wrote this: “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). What is left unwritten is how fortunate those people are who have someone who has thoroughly digested God’s love for them in their lives. How fortunate one is to have a mother who knows how well she has been loved by God. Why? Because God’s love is alive in a such people – vibrantly, noticeably, artistically alive. On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, He said this: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have love you, you also are to love one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Did we not know Christ’s love through Bobbe? Were we not blessed by God, by His love through this woman? The crown of life; the Lord has brought Bobbe home; paradise has been reclaimed. The Lord rose on Easter and ascended to the Father’s right hand to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-6). Come to me and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28). So said our Lord to Bobbe on the day that she slipped the bonds of this broken creation, the bonds of confusion and an aged body. Death has no sting. Death has no victory (1 Corinthians 15:55). Christ is risen and Bobbe sits at His table, a wedding banquet that awaits us (Revelation 19:7-9). We see through a glass darkly (1 Corinthians 13:12). Bobbe sees the Lord face to face.