

Homily

All Saints' Episcopal Church

The Rev. Martha Sterne
30 August, 2017



Harry, we love you. Sonny, Margaret, Doug. Jonathan, Poppy. Mason, Allison, Forrest. We bless your names, so often on Allison's lips. In her love and care for you dear ones and your love for your parents and one another, like this summer your graduating, reunioning, birthday bashing, Lion King play acting, loving life, doing it your way kind of being in the world, we got it. Somehow by the grace of God we caught something that this is how you be church - to be an alive and kicking family of God. Allison was smart and hilarious and loving midwife to real life for literally thousands of us as she and Harry partnered in the real life and love business - with franchises in Alabama and Sewanee and Manhattan and Virginia Seminary and with the home office here among the Saints. You, Harry and family, were her life and she brought us to life, and I don't ever want to get over her.

Let me give you a "priestly" example. One day early on Harry gave what he thought was a stunning sermon. And he looked over to Allison in the pew for an encouraging smile which she had plenty of, and she went (finger down throat). Now you hear that story as a new priest and that helps you get real, real fast. I'm terrified right this minute! Because there's no way, Allison's left the house - this family or this beloved thin space or this earth and she never will because when you are that real and loving, you pass it on and you got eternal written all over you.

I asked some of you to say what you thank God for in Allison and here we go.

Thank you Jesus for Allison hugs. Jesus showed us that the word really does become flesh and Allison lived that out every day. Hugging - little children of all ages and sizes - we all got hugged - old friend and newcomer, green seminarian and their hey, this isn't what I had in mind spouse, and churchy people and wouldn't be caught dead in a church people. By the way, Allison actually didn't come to church for religious purposes. Somebody asked in a group why do you come to church? Somebody said I go 'cause that's where the eucharist is and Allison said, well I go 'cause that's where my friends are. And dear ones she had no taste in friends. Look at all of us. When the diagnosis came, when the marriage was rocky, when the job was lost, when the dementia set in, when the story was bad but hilarious—rich guy, poor girl, decorator friend, checkout lady, Broadway star or tattered con artist, Nobel prize winner or nobody, bride and groom, groom and groom or bride and bride - she just had no taste - she lived enjoying. She lived in joy.

Thank you God for Allison listening. She did that intently and greatly and laughing—thank you God for the sexiest best laugh in the world. And thank you for Allison sometimes crying because life is heartbreaking and beautiful and we are but dust. And she knew that and listened and laughed anyway.

Thank you God for Allison faithfulness. Not sappy faith. O dear God no. She was not one for "severely sincere" faith. One of you told her you wished people confided in you more. And Allison said, ooh, I wish people confided in me less! Maybe she grumbled but hoo boy she was there for real—with tough, compassionate on the ground in living color faith - And didn't Allison love color! In clothes, in rooms, in odd people. For a long time because I loved Allison's Chinese red dining rooms I would paint my dining rooms Chinese red and then one day I painted my dining room dill pickle green. Cause that's my color, yes, an acquired taste which I don't think Allison ever liked but who cares? She liked me.

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Speaking of loving color, thank you God for Allison sight. Now you know these last years she could not see worth a hoot. At least that is what the eye tests said. So these last years in her card shark bridge group they used the largest cards ever made with JUMBO lettering. And they say she still had trouble separating the hearts from the diamonds and the clubs from the spades but if she put out a wrong card (a diamond when it should have been a heart for instance) her cutthroat friends would say Allison, do you have a heart? And then they'd just let her take her play back. Now let me tell you among bridge players, letting somebody take it back, that's the kingdom of heaven. So what if the eye tests said she was blind as a bat and couldn't see in the middle so that if she looked at your face she saw around you but not you? I'm here to tell you what you already know: Allison could see you. She always saw hearts and she always could see the heart of the matter.

Allison hated to move. Hated it. Every time Harry would get mixed up in some new scheme, she'd drag her heels all the way across whatever state lines necessary. She told somebody heaven has got to be where you don't have to say goodbye. And oh, isn't that the truth? Surely the hardest thing we human beings do is say goodbye. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust; yet even at the grave we make our song alleluia, alleluia. And it is so hard today to say goodbye and alleluia.

Now let me remind you Allison couldn't see the hymnal for nothing but she knew the songs and she LOVED the alleluias. So if you want to stay connected to Allison and who doesn't, you sing out loud; you listen hard; hug somebody; laugh your laugh; you live in color; and you live in-joy-ment, and you love really, profligately.

And you picture Allison stealing away to heaven and making a home in eternity and seeing people she loves eternally and waiting for Harry and the rest of us to get all the way there – for there will be Harry, just like your daddy said, there will be such a reunion. Amen

Martha P. Sterne

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