

NORTH EAST UMC  
MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR HOLLY S. CRISPELL

April 2, 2011  
John 14 : 1 – 6

LET NOT YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED

**Let not your hearts be troubled.**

**I wonder at times whether Jesus would have said this if he had lived today.**

**I mean, how can you say,  
Let not your hearts be troubled  
... when trouble is all around you?!**

**I mean, when you turn on CNN or Fox News, all you get is reports of trouble in the world.**

**When you open your newspaper, you read about all the troubling things that are going on.**

**When you tune in to NPR or some other 24-hour news radio, all you hear is story after story about trouble in the world.**

**Let not your hearts be troubled seems a bit ... shallow, don't you think, in a world that just seems full of trouble everywhere you look:**

**devasting earthquakes and monster tsunamis  
run-away nuclear power plants  
uprisings and revolutions abroad and deep financial crises at home  
three – count 'em – three wars involving American troops  
murder and mayhem in the streets of the cities**

**Let not your hearts be troubled, Jesus says to his disciples, and it sounds like he couldn't possibly be talking to us today.**

**But you needn't look to Iraq or Afghanistan, to the inner city or to Libya and Japan to see trouble.**

**Look no further than your own life, your own community:**

**Trouble's all around us here, too.**

**Trouble with addictions**

**Trouble with serious illness**

**Trouble with broken relationships**

**Trouble with an uncooperative co-worker**

**Trouble with an inconsiderate neighbor**

**Trouble with money**

**Trouble with your teenage kids ...**

**The list goes on and on.**

**Let not your hearts be troubled, Jesus says to his disciples, and it sounds like he couldn't possibly be talking to us.**

**And truth be told, Jesus doesn't follow his own advice, either, because the Gospel writer in John elsewhere reports many instances where Jesus' heart is troubled:**

**Jesus is "greatly disturbed" and weeps at the grave of Lazarus (11:38)**

**Jesus says his "soul is troubled" when he speaks about his coming suffering and execution (12:27)**

**Jesus is "troubled in spirit" when he predicts that one of his disciples will betray him (13:21).**

**Jesus, in other words, shares our troubled existence and shares in our anxiety and fear.**

**And he shares our grief.**

**Our hearts – and his – ARE troubled as we gather today to remember our sister, Holly S. Crispell,**

**as we gather to say goodbye,  
as we surround Mark and the family with our love  
as we comfort one another in this hour of great loss.**

**Our hearts ARE troubled today,  
because we are sad,  
and angry  
and shocked that death has stolen away another whose time  
had not yet come.**

**Suddenly, unexpectedly, with brutal finality  
Holly's life ended at 58 ... much too short, much too soon.**

**None of us was ready for it, least of all Mark,  
least of all Holly herself.**

**Just a little more than a week ago, our sister Holly was full of  
life and energy and plans ...**

**and man, let me tell you, Holly always had plans.**

**Perhaps my fondest memory of her is the day we talked  
about starting a new ministry in Cecil County, and Holly  
came up with this idea that maybe the church should buy a  
boat and offer a "floating" worship service that would travel  
from town to town along the bay.**

**I thought, what a great and creative idea ... and a little wacky,  
too ... and before I knew it, Holly came dancing into my office**

**with a print-out of yachts for sale that she had gotten off the internet.**

**See, where I saw an impossible dream, Holly saw a possible reality ... she was a dreamer, of sorts, with a large vision of what the church of God could be in the world, but also an imminently practical person who knew how to translate a vision into a program.**

**And you know what?**

**Holly lived to see her dream come true.**

**When they arrived here in North East, Mark and Holly began to undertake what is arguably the most difficult job in the church today, the redevelopment of a congregation that has known only decline for much of its life.**

**Mark and Holly brought a maritime theme to Bethel Lutheran Church (you can see it when you enter the church and immediately are drawn to the beautifully done display in the back of the sanctuary ... Holly's doing),**

**They came to Bethel and brought this maritime theme, and wouldn't you know, their first summer here they rented a boat and did church on the water ...**

**Holly's dreams may have been large and here ideas a bit ... shall we say ... unorthodox at times, but here was a woman who knew how to translate ideas into real programs.**

**At Bethel, she was Mark's partner in ministry.**

**O sure, he's the pastor, he's the redeveloper, but they worked as a team, always,**

**and you can see Holly's hand at Bethel in so many ways. Together, they began this arduous task of redevelopment, bringing new hope and a new vision to a small struggling congregation .... and at Bethel, worship attendance has almost tripled since they got there.**

**You could see Holly's hand at St. Peter Lutheran Church in Fullerton, too.**

**There, the contemporary worship service was Holly's "baby" ... and her spirit lives on to this day at St. Peter's, not least in this worship band that has come today to honor Holly.**

**But perhaps her true legacy was her work with the Delaware-Maryland Synod.**

**For more than 20 years, Holly served on the synod staff, first in Hagerstown, then in Towson, then at the Lutheran Center in the Inner Harbor. I guess with all this moving around, you couldn't always be sure where exactly the synod office was ... but you could always be sure that Holly would be there making sure that pastors and leaders and congregations were served with competence and dedication.**

**She joined the synod staff in 1987, in September, and was a fixture through three office locations and five bishops.**

**With the synod, her "baby" was PIF-PIV ... Partners in Faith, Partners in Vision ... for many years the synod's premier lay leadership development event.**

**But there was a another baby, a twin, a second passion of hers that speaks to Holly's vision: The Vineyard, a resource center that for decades provided teaching materials to**

leaders and churches throughout the synod. Holly poured her heart into it, and perhaps my second most precious memory of her is ... Holly sitting in the Vineyard, surrounded, no, almost buried by books and videos and curricula in three-ring binders, furiously bringing order to what looked like chaos to the rest of us ... but to Holly, every item had its place, and she would be able to find for you just what you were looking for.

The Vineyard was her passion, but when it became another victim of the internet and it became so much easier to simply download resources, Holly in characteristic stoicism presided over its dismantling ...

I cannot imagine how hard it must have been for her to take apart what she had so lovingly built ... but even here, her practical side won out and she made darn sure that all these videos and books and folders found new homes in congregations that needed them.

Holly leaves a large hole ... in the life of our synod, here in North East, at Bethel, for her family and especially for Mark.

“We were a team,” Mark said to me last week, “we did everything together. We were partners.”

“And I feel,” Mark said, “like I’ve been cut in half.”

We can’t imagine, Mark, what it must feel like to so suddenly be robbed of your wife, your partner in ministry, your soul mate ,, or perhaps we can, because grief and pain are universal human experiences ...

and they are experiences that Jesus is intimately familiar with.

**Jesus knows what a troubled heart feels like.  
He knows the anguish of your sudden loss, Mark,  
Jesus knows the suffering this loss brings.**

**Perhaps that is why Jesus can say to us today,  
Let not your hearts be troubled,**

**because he points to a larger reality, to a more real  
experience, to a greater love:**

**In my Father's house, Jesus assures us, there are many  
rooms.**

**If it were not so, would I have told you that I go and prepare a  
place for you?**

**And when 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.**

**So where is this "house" Jesus tells us about?**

**The original text is quite ambiguous here, and the "house"  
(*oikos* for those of you who had Greek in seminary) can be  
translated as a building, physical structure, a house  
but also as "a household" which points to a relationship, to a  
community.**

**Same with this "place" (*monē*) that Jesus is preparing for us.  
You can translate this word as a physical structure, but also  
as a figurative place as part of a community.**

**You see, perhaps more than a mansion in the sky,  
Jesus is pointing in this text to a relationship ... a  
relationship he has with the Father, and a relationship he has  
with the disciples and, through Jesus, the relationship we  
have with God.**

**“I will come again and will take you to myself that were I am you may be also.”**

**Here is the heart of the Good News, the very heart of the Gospel, a Gospel that Holly knew so well and lived so passionately.**

**you see, Jesus is talking about relationships ... an abiding relationship that he has made possible between God and human beings, between himself and us.**

**It’s about relationship, it’s about community, it’s about dwelling with Jesus in a “place” where the divine and the human meet.**

**So I guess I’d have to agree with all the commentators who point out that Jesus isn’t talking about a physical house up there in the sky where he goes to get our heavenly accommodations ready, a kind of heavenly bed-and-breakfast.**

**I guess I’d agree .... with my head ... but that’s not where my heart is today.**

**I don’t know about you, but whatever the commentaries have to say about this text, I take great comfort in the thought that Thursday evening a week ago, while Holly slipped away quietly and the rest of us weren’t looking, a maintenance crew went to that great mansion, to the Father’s house, and there they put a sparkling new name plate on one of the many vacant rooms, a room that would soon have an occupant.**

**And the name plate said:  
Holly S. Crispell**

**because in our Father's house,  
there are many rooms,  
.... and one of them is Holly's.**

**And that, brothers and sisters, is the Good News for you  
today, even on a day as difficult as this, and to that, let the  
people of God say: AMEN.**