

Funeral: Louise Averette Pilcher

Micah 6:8 2 Timothy 4:7

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

Of all the funerals at which I have had the privilege of speaking, never have these words from the prophet Micah been more fitting—never have they applied quite so well—as they do to Louise Pilcher. “He has told you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

I came to know Ms. Louise little by little beginning a couple years ago after she moved to Maple Court, an assisted living facility that sits right behind our church. I had no idea what to expect when Herb and Darlene asked me to come visit with her the first time. I walked into her bright sunny room, filled with cards from friends and photos of all these wild and wonderful family members—a pantheon of her loved ones, young and old—and there, seated in her chair with every bit of kindness, poise, and humility, the sun shining on her shoulders, was Ms. Louise.

What I quickly figured out is that while Louise Pilcher was willing to talk about herself—her family, her life, her hopes, her prayers, her fears, her dreams—she was always far more interested in hearing about you. We would talk a little bit, and she would answer some of my questions, but then she would turn and say, “Well tell me about *your* children. Tell me about *your* family. How old are they? Do you have boys or girls? What are their names?” Because you see, all her life, Louise Pilcher was a consummate caregiver, a gracious hostess, a welcomer of all . . . and no matter who you were, she was going to put you, your needs, and your story before her own.

This seems to be the consensus of her family, too. When I asked some of them what made Ms. Louise happiest in this life, the answer—hands down—was “family.” She and Mr. Bill loved the very idea of family, but to them, the idea of family was large and expansive. They took everyone in, and nothing made her happier than to be cooking in a house full of people, especially when it was full of children, or better yet, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They would get together for family reunions and holidays with folks sleeping on the floor or outside in army issue jungle hammocks, everyone stacked on top of one another. To Mrs. Louise, it was pure gold. As someone told me yesterday, there was a moment when she and Mr. Bill looked around the house at one of these gatherings, and you could see them beaming with pride as they said, “Look. Five generations all under one roof.”

One time when she and I were talking about my children, who are both girls, I said, “Ms. Louise, what was it like having so many boys? Thank goodness for Betty! What about all those boys?”

“Oh,” she said, “We did alright. They were all good boys.” Then there was a *long* pause. “Herbert was a mess, but they were good boys.”

Ms. Louise was also tough and independent, which she had to be with the countless moves across the United States and Europe that came with Mr. Bill’s military career. Much of the time, she was on her own to unpack and keep house while he was off on travels or gone to war, and she held it all together. In fact, her house was so immaculate that when Mr. Bill did come home he would get onto her for vacuuming too much. They also say this sweet woman, who loved her husband to no end, also knew how to put him in his place when he needed it. “Mama never got loud or fussed,” they say. “It was when she got *quiet* that you knew she was mad.” That’s usually when Mr. Bill would head out to the golf course.

Of course, all the love, kindness, compassion, tenacity, and independence she cultivated over her life became the very tools she needed most when she had Bruce, her developmentally disabled son. For forty-three years, Ms. Louise took close care of him. Doing so became nothing less than her life’s work. It was not always easy, but he was hers, and the deal she made with God was that if she could keep him, she would take care of him as long as she was humanly capable. During those forty-three years, she also took in her aging mother and cared for her in her home. As the years passed, she and Mr. Bill did all they could to transform not only their household but also their communities for people like Bruce, founding the Association for Retarded Citizens in Albany and working tirelessly with the Special Olympics. An avid bowler, she even kept score for Special Olympics bowling teams. This woman was both tough and beautiful. Independent and kind. “I have fought the good fight,” says 2 Timothy, “I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” That describes Louise Pilcher so perfectly. And here toward the end, as she finished her race, boy was she ready to make it to the other side and join the love of her life for their next new adventure.

Betty and Herb said last night, “Gee, you know, we make Mama sound like an absolute saint.” But you know what? She *was* a saint. Not because she was perfect, but because she was loved by God and because she turned and offered that same love to the rest of the world the best she knew how. Betty says she used to joke with Ms. Louise, saying, “Mother, you are setting the bar way too high!” But that’s the funny thing, isn’t it? When it comes to the God we love—the God Ms. Louise knew, the God you and I have come to know in Jesus Christ—*there is no bar*. There is no test. There is nothing you have to pass. There is only love. Ms. Louise showed us all what a life lived in that kind of love can really mean.

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” To that, I say, “Amen, Ms. Louise. Thank you for a life well lived and for love so freely given.”

Amen.