

Funeral: Nancy Quynn

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33

Psalm 46

2 Corinthians 4:16—5:9

John 14:1-6

My first encounter with Nancy Quynn
was not unlike what I've heard
many of you describe
as your first encounter with Nancy.

It happened—of course—
in a coffee shop.

It was at the Bistro,
downtown, to be exact,
and for me, it was more of an observation
than a direct encounter.

I was seated at a table
drinking coffee
and maybe working on a sermon
or studying a book.
And one table over,
there was a flurry of activity.
They were preparing for someone special.

At that table,
there were people whom I knew well.
Lisa Gibbs, Kathy Moreno, others.
There were balloons and gifts,
and maybe a cake.

And then, as they all got ready,
in walks this lovely, funny, gentle woman,
carrying her bag
with a wry smile on her face as if to say,
“What are you guys up to?”

And then right there,
in front of God and everybody,
they all broke out in song:
“For she's a jolly good fellow,
for she's a jolly good fellow,
for she's a jolly good fellow,
that nobody can deny.”

They laughed and cackled.
She seemed delighted and surprised,
a little embarrassed, but in a good way.

And although I was not at that table
and that was not my group,
I was so glad to be in that room that day
because the contagion of all that joy
was downright unstoppable.
Their cup ‘ranneth’ over,
and I thought,
“I don’t know who that lady is,
but I know that that right there
that is the kind of friendship and love
that we’d all give anything to have.”

* * *

Over the past few days,
many of you have shared
your stories of Nancy with me,
and it turns out the coffee shop
is a common thread.

Sounds like Nancy *loved*
a good cup of coffee,
but far more than that,
she relished the opportunity
to be with people . . .
to pull people together
into a community of
real friendship,
real support,
real love.

Someone told me they first met Nancy
over coffee back in the 1990’s.
They talked about the group
that would gather around her every morning.
A farmer, a lawyer, an entertainer,
a physician, a secretary, a store manager,
a homemaker, a nontraditional college student,
a parent of a special needs child,
a sales person, a nurse, and more.

They all loved coffee.
But more than that,
they all loved Nancy,
and they all loved talking.

“Admission” to the group
was open to anybody
with just three basic rules:

- Respect each other’s views.
- Nothing spoken leaves the building.
- Never a cross word.

Of all those who would gather together,
they say Nancy was the best listener.
She had this knack for summarizing your views
with grace, and kindness, and clarity
so that you knew you had been loved and heard,
even if your views were diametrically opposed to hers.
She was the glue that held everyone together.

* * *

But of course, you know that
Nancy was so much more than just
the president of the local coffee klatch.

For as kind as people say she was,
Nancy Quynn was also a force to be reckoned with,
especially when it came
to justice, decency, human rights,
and the dignity and welfare of all people.

As an immigration attorney,
she worked with dogged determination
for the sake of those who had no voice.
The truth is, we may never know
the number of people whose lives Nancy
supported, and salvaged, and saved
throughout the breadth of her career.

One of her colleagues said she was
“a true sister in the law”:
someone who knew that the law
is not something to make a buck off of,
but something to lift others up with.

Ironically, someone told me about how,
two decades ago, they had waited for *years*
to get legal residency in the United States,
but in 1995—the day before they went to finalize it—
the government shut down
and threw a wrench into the whole thing.
Before they knew it,
they were facing a backlog of paperwork
and a mountain of uncertainty.

But ever calm, ever wise, ever cool and collected,
Nancy stood by them and guided them through.

Don't you know
that with yet another shutdown
now happening twenty years later—
yet another round of uncertainty and fear
for the children of immigrants—
Nancy Quynn must be up in heaven,
still ever calm, ever wise, ever cool and collected,
but doing all in her power
to knock some heavenly sense
into those of us here on earth?

* * *

I think there's a reason so many of us
love someone like Nancy,
and it's because people like Nancy remind us
that the work of God is not just in heaven.
The work of God is also right here.

It's so easy for us to hear
readings like the ones we've just heard:
Paul's letter to the Corinthians
where he says we have a home with God
eternal in the heavens,
or Jesus' speech to the disciples
where he says there's plenty of room with God,
that in his Father's house there are many mansions.
It's easy for us to hear all of that
and to assume that it's only true *after* we die . . .
that God's goodness is only for the other side.

But Nancy Quynn knew better.

Nancy Quynn knew
that if there's enough room
for everybody up in heaven,
then by God, there's enough room
for everybody here on earth.

Whether it was through
adopting Vicky as her own daughter—
something that started as a favor
but ended up forever—
or whether it was through
her beautiful career as an attorney,
or whether it was through
her genuine friendships
forged over a lifetime of lattes,
Nancy Quynn made room.

She refused to let others' lives
become a living hell,
so she gave everything she had
to bring others' lives
closer to heaven.

If that's not like Jesus,
I don't know what is.

In the words of the old hymn that we just sang,
“these are the ones we should serve,
these are the ones we should love.
All are neighbors to us . . . and you.”

* * *

In just a few minutes
at the end of this service,
we're going to go out on a high note,
because as much as we will miss Nancy,
we know that she is with the Lord,
and we know Nancy would not want us
to just sit around and be sad.

So at the end,
we're going to sing a hymn
that I hope is familiar to you.
It's the one they call “Ode to Joy.”
When we get to that moment,

whoever you are—
whether you're Catholic, Baptist, Episcopal
or something else altogether—
I want you to pick up that red hymnal
and I want you to sing with all your heart
as we worship God
and sing Nancy off into heaven.

But as we do so with gusto and joy,
pay close attention to that last verse,
and sing those words with all your might:

“Thou art giving and forgiving
ever blessing, ever blest,
wellspring of the joy of living
ocean-depth of happy rest!
Thou our Father, Christ our brother:
all who live in love are thine:
teach us how to love each other,
lift us to the joy divine.”

There can be no doubt among us here
that the Lord our God
used Nancy Quynn
to teach us how to love each other.

So today, tomorrow, and all the rest of our lives,
let us do all in our power
to follow her example
and that of our Lord Jesus Christ:
to serve the least among us
and lift each other
to the joy divine.

Amen.