

## Funeral: Nancy Quynn

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Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33

Psalm 46

2 Corinthians 4:16—5:9

John 14:1-6

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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.