

Homily for Julia L. Newton's Memorial Service
Delivered by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas

August 30, 2010
Grace Church, Amherst

Julia L. Newton
October 2, 1944 - August 10, 2010

We have gathered to mourn the death and celebrate the life of Julia Newton, and to give God thanks for sending her into this world, and for welcoming her home at her journey's end. I would like to express my sympathy to her family, especially her brother Alan, to her dear friends, and to all of you who have come to honor this woman who touched your life.

I never met Julie, so I can't speak about her from direct experience. But from what I have read, and from the stories that some of you have told me, I know that she was a woman who loved animals -- dogs and cats, her cat, Isabel, and the strays and unwanted pets that she cared for at the Dakin Animal Shelter. I understand that Julie started work in the Amherst College library straight out of high school, and that she worked there until her retirement 40 years later. She must have been good with language and reading and words, for Julie was a champion speller, and her proud mother enjoyed recounting tales of the many spelling bees that her daughter had won.

Julie balanced all that time spent indoors with a yen for the outdoors, too, for she loved to fish -- I'm told that she would sneak away sometimes at opportune moments to get in a little fishing -- and she loved to golf. She also balanced her work life with what sounds like real pleasure in partying and having fun. She was devoted to her friends, and she loved taking those trips to Hampton Beach. I'm told that she also enjoyed mystery evenings in restaurants, the pleasure of participating in the drama of solving the "Who Done It"s.

It won't come as news to you that Julie also suffered in her life. She had some very real challenges to contend with. Some of her struggles we know about, and some of them we will never know, for we all have a solitary core, an inner sanctum in which God alone is privy to our yearning and sorrow.

But everyone tells me how much Julie loved her father, Ward, how much she enjoyed playing golf with him, how she always appreciated his

company and companionship. And I know how mindful Julie was of her duty to her mother. Of all the stories that I heard about Julie, the one that moves me most is the story of how she eventually moved back in with her mother and shared a life with her. Julie didn't have to do that, and to some degree it must have been a difficult choice to make and carry out, for Julie and her mother did not always see eye to eye. They had their moments of conflict and mutual misunderstanding. Yet Julie expressed a deep loyalty and commitment to her mother, and she rose above their differences. She stayed the course, and she did the loving thing. She showed up for her mother, and she kept on showing up, doing all she could to allow her mother to stay at home for as long she possibly could. When Elsie eventually had to move to a nursing home, Julie kept visiting her faithfully two or three times a week. Even if her mother didn't recognize her, even if her mother was combative, Julie visited her all the same, until just a few months before Julie died.

It is that quality of loyalty and faithfulness that stands out for me as I contemplate Julie's life, her willingness to care for her mother day in and day out, even as her mother grew more forgetful and frail. There must have been something in Julie that wanted to reach out to the weak and the lost, just as she cared for the lost and wounded animals in the Dakin shelter. There must have been something in Julie that gave her the capacity to give her all to something and to stick by it to the end, whether it be a job that she held for decades or the decision to live with and care for an aging parent. Julie knew how to be faithful, even when faithfulness came at a cost.

I wonder now, as Julie greets Jesus, the Good Shepherd of her soul, whether they recognize in each other some of the same qualities -- the capacity to be faithful, the desire to protect, the willingness to love, even when it comes at a cost. Julie carried those holy qualities like seeds within her, for she was made in the image of God, and I dare to believe that everything that was good in her, everything that was faithful and generous and loving and kind, is now blossoming in the fullness of God. As we heard in the reading from the First Letter of John, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is" [I John 3:1-2].

That is the promise of the Gospel: the day will come for us, as it has now come for Julie, when we will see God face to face -- when at last we will know and be fully known, when we will see and be fully seen, when we will love and be fully loved. The day will come when everything that is good in us will spring up like flowers, and even now -- today, with every

choice we make and every word we say -- you and I have a chance to let the divine goodness that is planted within us be known and expressed. There are times when Julie did this in a courageous and beautiful way, and I would say that even though Julie never grew tall, her spirit was tall. When we gaze at her, we glimpse times when she stood as tall as those “oaks of righteousness” mentioned by the prophet Isaiah, “the planting of the Lord, to display his glory” [Isaiah 61:3].

After the service is over, I invite you to join us in a procession to the Grace Church Columbarium, where we will bury Julie’s ashes. Because of the condition of the sidewalk on Spring Street, the best way to reach the Columbarium is through the church buildings. You may use the elevator or the stairs to reach the bottom floor, and then walk through the Cloister to the Columbarium, which is an interior garden set aside for the burial and interment of ashes. We will have a brief service there as we commit her ashes to the ground, in a place just opposite the burial site for her parents.

Right now, Julie is in the presence of the God who brings healing, the God who brings fullness of life. As we prepare to bring Julie’s ashes to their final resting place, we have the assurance of knowing that she is safe, that she is loved, and that Jesus has prepared a dwelling place for her in the very heart of God.

I would like to close with a prayer.

“O Lord, support us all the day long of this troublous life, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and our work is done. Then in thy mercy grant us a safe lodging, and a holy rest, and peace at the last.”¹

Julie, your work is done. You have found your safe lodging. You have received a holy rest, and you have been given peace at last. Rest in God's heart, Julie, and pray for us as we pray for you.

¹ *The Book of Common Prayer*, “In the Evening,” p. 833.