

Homily for Sophie Parker Funeral
June 10, 2022
St. Mark's Episcopal Church | Milwaukee, WI
The Rev. Ian Burch

Last month, I was down at a conference in Chicago for the day. For whatever reason, I decided to wear a pair of shoes I typically leave in the back of the closet. And all day long, on the elevator, at lunch, in the lobby, I kept getting compliments “hey nice shoes.” I am unaccustomed to getting compliments on how I dress, because I don't have a very good eye for art or color or fashion. Those fancy shoes I was wearing, you see, were a gift. And, in fact, if you ever see me looking stylish, likely the clothes were likely bought FOR me rather than BY me.

So, I find myself absolutely entranced by people who have a good eye, an artists' eye. And, of course, that is one of the things I noticed most about Sophie. I can see her in our parish hall, after a service. Her silver brooch compliments her silver hair above a beautiful grey blazer with interesting textures and the impeccable style of a great lady. She had an artists' way about her person. And this was true when she was hale and strong, and it continued to be true even as she began to slow. Even when she would lose the thread of a conversation, her eye never faltered.

I envy these artists among us who see reality in a particular way. I think for a lot of us, the world can be a practical place, a mundane place, even a scary place. But the artists among us bring a kind of holy regard to our lives for which we are grateful. You cannot look at the flowers Sophie painted and not know that she was borrowing God's vision while she painted.

But, what do we do when a great artist dies? How do we mourn when we will miss that special sight, that wonderful Sophie?

Well, perhaps at times like this it is sensible to lean on the wisdom of the church – the same wisdom that Sophie participated in for 64 years here at St. Mark's. The church teaches that all that comes from God is a gift and will eventually return. And I wonder if it is helpful to think about this artists' gift, this special vision, as something that is on loan from the very eyes of God.

Because where is the font of all inspiration if not God the creator and perfecter of all things? The same God who made the rainbow and hung the Pleiades in the sky has been an inspiration for artists since early man was painting horses on the inside of caves in France. But those divine eyes are always just on loan. And one day they have to return to the source, they have to return to God.

Which is why, of course, we are here. Sophie has returned to God. And so we mourn. And so we celebrate. One of the quirks of being human is that we can feel more than one thing at a time. We can be glad for her homecoming to a remarkable and loving God. And we can also be sad that we miss her and would like to hear her Virginian accent calling us by name one more time. So, for today, let both things be true, because both things are true.

Sophie heard scripture in this room, she broke bread at this table, and she even led this parish as one of the first female vestry members in the entire diocese. She would have known very well

the teachings of the church; she would have known well the promises of Jesus. I go to prepare a place for you, says John's Gospel. And that is the Good News that we preach at St. Mark's and that has been preached at St. Mark's every Sunday that she sat in these pews.

And so now the fulfillment of her walk with God and with the church is upon us, as it will be upon us all one day. And the promise for Sophie is the same as the promise for us. We will return to our God. And all the gifts that we have been lent for the betterment of the world will return to their source. Go with God, Sophie. Thank you for what you have meant to your family, this church, and your community. And thank you for blessing us with your artist's vision. May her soul and the souls of all the faithful departed rest in peace. Amen.