



THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF NEW CANAAN

January 5, 2008

Eulogy for The Rev. Lidabell Lunt Pollard
by The Reverend Harold E. Masback, III

My dear friends. We who gather this morning are a diverse lot. Young and old, we come from near and far. As we look around the meeting house, some of us recognize faces from our life together here on God's Acre, some nod at old friends from Chatham, or Vero Beach, or Charlotte, or Rochester. But for all our diversity, there is something I think I know about each one of you, and there is something each of you should know about me.

I hope I don't betray any confidences by suggesting that I know that each of you, every single one of you . . . loves Lidabell Pollard. And there has never been any secret in this meeting house that I love Lidabell Pollard. As one of Lidabell's friends noted, there are some people in life you have to love. Then there are a few people in life you choose to love. But then there are some people in life you just can't help but love, and Lidabell was one of those.

I'm pretty sure every one in this room would gladly serve as president of the Lidabell fan club . . . the thing is that that assignment got grabbed on June 21, 1956 at a restaurant in the Hotel Martinez in Cannes, France by one Lieutenant J.G. Charles F. Pollard, and it's pretty clear Chuck's never going to let the post go. And so, the first thing I want to say to you, Chuck, is that everybody in this room thanks God for June 21, 1956 just like you do, because if you had not been what you were to Lidabell, she could not have been what she was to each of us. Thank you.

We each loved Lidabell in different seasons and in different capacities. We loved her as sister, wife, mom, friend, colleague, teacher, counselor, mentor, pastor, role model or even pioneer; but we all loved her. And just this morning our love is proving to be a costly love, for we have lost our Lidabell, our beautiful, joyful, radiant, courageous Lidabell. And the remorseless mathematics of love and loss are that there can be no great love without the risk of great loss. As a wise rabbi once asked, "would you prefer

that she had been less dear then so that the loss would be less now?"

We mourn for Lidabell: why shouldn't this good and faithful and giving soul enjoy her full measure of life with her husband and children and grandchildren and friends? We mourn for Lidabell's family: why shouldn't Chuck, and Amy, Sara and Chip and the grandkids enjoy the decades they'd envisioned with Babe, mom, G.G. We mourn for ourselves, why shouldn't we see more of that smile, hear more of that giggle, read more of those sermons, savor more of those notes?

These are all important and difficult questions, but they weren't the most important questions for Lidabell. Listen to the opening lines of her 1996 Easter Sermon:

"At the southern most point of South Africa is a cape around which the storms are always raging. For a thousand years, no one knew what lay beyond that cape, for no ship had ever returned to tell the tale. It was called the Cape of Storms.

In the sixteenth century, a Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama, successfully sailed around the cape and found beyond it a great calm sea and beyond that the shores of India. After his voyage, the name of the cape was changed. It has been known ever since as the Cape of Good Hope.

Until that first Easter morning, death had been the Cape of Storms. No one knew what lay beyond the dark and final tomb. But suddenly, on that first Easter morning, the word came back that death had been vanquished. The man, Jesus Christ, was alive. Death, the cape of fear and storm, had been conquered. Death for all who believe in Jesus Christ had become the Cape of Good Hope. Death became only a corner to turn before sailing into a calm sea; and beyond the calm sea, the great joy of being welcomed into God's everlasting kingdom.

Dear friends, the message of Easter is that we don't need to fear death, if we follow Jesus Christ. Death has been conquered. Jesus goes before us on our journey through life. At every fearful place, Jesus is there waiting for us, guiding us to a new place, a place of peace and joy."

Pure Gospel. Pure Lidabell.

Lidabell was no starry-eyed fantasist. She never denied that life was full of difficulty and storms and fearful places. She had seen much too much death and loss up close and personal for that. Lidabell just didn't see the "why" questions as primary. Rather than ask "why is life hard?" Lidabell asked "how shall we respond?" Should we set our sights on the storm at the cape or on the calm waters beyond? Should our hearts quake at the prospect of fearful places or leap at the love of Christ guiding us through?

In her 1993 Christmas sermon, Lidabell quoted a line of verse, "Two men looked out from prison bars; one saw mud, the other saw stars" continuing, "Many of us are imprisoned in some way. We are imprisoned by poor health, bad tempers, unforgiving hearts, drug problems, and unsatisfactory relationships. What are we doing about it? Are we ruled by the prison bars, or can we look beyond the bars to see the stars?"

"Life my dear friends is not easy and we can choose to be defeated by life or we can look for the good, the wonder, the laughter and receive the joy of Christmas."

There, right there was the heart of Lidabell's message: a message of ultimate faith in God, a message of trust in Christ's promise that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly, a message of belief in Paul's promise that God's personal will for each of God's children is that we rejoice always, a message of what Bernice Bruteau called "radical optimism."

Does this sound unrealistic to you? Impossible? An airy-fairy prescription beyond the reach of mere mortals? Before you conclude that it is, I ask you to consider one key piece of evidence, one crucial datum from our shared experience. I ask you to consider the life we are celebrating this morning.

You see, you and I are united by something more than just our love for Lidabell, we are united by the profound impact she had on each of our lives.

St. Francis of Assisi wrote that there aren't just four gospels, there are five. In addition to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John there is the gospel of your own life.

And your life may be the only gospel some people will ever read.

Lidabell had a profound impact on each of our lives because we were each privileged to read the gospel of her life. And the power of Lidabell's gospel was that there was an utter congruence, a complete consistency between who she was, and how she taught, and what she taught. Her presence, her manner, her demeanor were full of joy and love and faith and optimism. Her sermons and classes were delivered with joy and love and faith and optimism. Her message was, guess what, a message of joy and love and faith and optimism.

Let me put it to you this way, if I asked ten of you to tell us what you will most remember about Lidabell, what do you think the answer would be? Wouldn't it be her smile? That radiant, joyful, smile. Maybe her giggle or twinkling eyes would be a close second, but for sure, first place would go to that smile.

Chip remembers tagging along to the grocery store with his mom. Complete strangers would see her smiling and just start smiling spontaneously themselves. A parishioner writes, "Her face said it all, sparkling eyes but particularly her smile. What will stay with us forever as her most wonderful gift to us all was her beaming smile that simply lit up the world." Radical optimism.

Or, let me put it to you this way. If I asked ten of you to tell us what you most remember about her preaching style, what do you think the answer would be? Wouldn't it be: uplifting, hopeful, joyful, inspiring. A parishioner writes, "Never, ever did I feel as close to my maker as when a lamb in Lidabell's flock. It wasn't just her spell binding sermons - but who could ever get a message across in such a human, often mirthful way." Radical optimism.

Or, let me put it to you this way. If I asked ten of you to tell us what you remember most about her message, her exhortation, what do you think the answer would be? Wouldn't it be this: "See Christ in others and be Christ to others." Lidabell had a shrewd and practiced eye, and had it been her task in life, she could have catalogued anyone's faults and foibles, but she went the other way. The task Lidabell set for herself was to see the best, the most beautiful, the most worthy in each of us, to see Christ in each of us. Radical optimism.

Or, let me put it to you this way. If I asked ten of you what you remember of Lidabell's answer to financial challenges, what do you think the answer would be? Wouldn't it be this? "God will provide." As our long time church treasurer wrote, "Lidabell knew I had great difficulty with the budgeting concept of 'God will provide.' Banker DNA doesn't allow us to think that way. Despite my predictable and annual dire predictions, there was never a deficit year at the church during the years of Lidabell's senior ministry. She proved me wrong year after year." Radical optimism.

Do you want to know how deeply and authentically Lidabell's joyful faith ran. I remember sitting in her office right before she started her first course of chemo nine years ago. She said, you know what, Skip, I've got a choice about how I view this chemotherapy. Most folks view chemo as a poison, a necessary toxin they have to inject to kill the cancer. That's not the way I'm going look at it. Somebody gave me this angel pin. I'm going to put this pin on and look at the chemo as a blessed angel of the Holy Spirit, flying through my body and cleansing me of all illness. That's radical optimism. And I can't help but think that that faith is part of the reason we had the gift of the last nine years with her.

Love, faith, joy: the Gospel of Jesus the Christ: that's the gospel we read in the life of his servant and our shepherd, Lidabell Pollard. I think Chip put it well when he told me that the same qualities we saw in Lidabell's ministry were already on display in her role as mom and wife. It was as if his mom was in on a great secret, the secret message of love and joy. It wasn't her message, she was just blessed to get it. Her only wish was that we would all get it too, that we would all feel the same joy that she felt, feel the same love that she felt, and share it with each other: that we would see Christ in others and be Christ to others.

So, I guess the last thing I want to say, on behalf of all of us who love Lidabell, is thank you, Chuck, Amy, Sara and Chip for sharing her with us. And thank you for taking such good care of her after her ministry here was done. And I want to say, thanks be to God, that for Lidabell the pain is over, and that she has rounded the corner of the Cape of Good Hope to sail on into a calm sea, and beyond the calm sea, the great

joy of being welcomed into God's everlasting kingdom.
Amen.