

**From *A Service of Witness to the Resurrection* for
Elizabeth “Libby” Wolf (1925-2021)**

November 20, 2021

Rev. Dorothy Boulton
Catonsville Presbyterian Church, Catonsville, MD

1 Timothy 3:8-10, 13

Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. Those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

I'm not sure what kind of people were seeking the role of deacon during the writing of this letter given the remarks about wine and money, but the author is clear about this: that they must hold fast to the mystery of faith, and that those who serve well gain standing for themselves in the community, and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Libby Wolf, it must be said, is a deacon who held fast and served well.

Libby was ordained as a deacon in 1988 and contributed to that ministry numerous times at Catonsville Presbyterian. She fit the description to a “T”. In our training materials for new deacons, the literature includes these words: “Deacons are people persons. Their hearts go out to those in distress, to members who have suffered loss, to new members who need a word of welcome, and to members who are shut in and lonely and cannot leave their homes.” Our own Book of Order states that people of “spiritual character, honest repute, exemplary lives, brotherly and sisterly love, warm sympathies, and sound judgment should be chosen for this office.” G-60401. Such witness and service follows the example of Jesus Christ.

It was a joy to serve with Libby as she fulfilled this calling, as she did indeed follow Christ's example. In all she did – sympathy, compassion, care – all came as naturally to her as breathing. The ministry of visitation was a particular gift, and Libby's gentle and spirited presence was welcomed and appreciated by all of our homebound members. She had a particular love of flowers, as you know, and took delight in sharing their beauty with others. One of the deacon's ministries is to deliver flowers, along with a caring smile, and at this, Libby, of course, excelled.

The ministry of a deacon is of love and prayer, and Libby would share these with generosity and abundance. And she would receive these gifts with grace as well. To be in prayer with her was a holy thing. And we could have tears in our eyes without shame or self-consciousness as we said together our earnest “Amen.”

Her spirit was always gracious and kind. She had thoughtful words to share, keen insight, and one of the greatest senses of humor ever. Always ready to laugh, even in her 80's and 90's, she had a giggle that always seemed to me to be that of a young woman --- buoyant, lively, infectious, genuine, and warm. To

be in her company, was a gift... whether as her colleague in ministry if we'd pay a visit together, or if you'd encounter her alongside in the choir loft, or even chatting with her seated in the church pew.

Libby made space for you. She had a knack of making one feel that being in company together was the best thing that could happen all day. She took such pleasure in being with people, and one couldn't help but take delight in her. She loved telling stories....and she loved to listen as well. She had a way of looking at someone, as if they were the most important person in the room.

And when Libby saw a need, she met it with a grace that made it a joy for her and a joy for the one who would receive. When one is ordained a deacon, one is ordained for life. And all these gifts that Libby shared as a deacon, she shared freely with all of us – whether she was serving on the Board or not.

When I first arrived at the church, my family was in a bit of a money squeeze. And I don't know how she guessed, but Libby took me out to Costco one day and I still remember her purchasing a package of frozen hamburgers, knowing that our sons, Matt & Charlie would really enjoy them. Ordinarily, I suppose I would have felt self-conscious about it, but Libby had a way of letting you know that this was a blessing for her to be able to share, and somehow, it became a blessing to receive. Libby.... just had a way of making life sacred, that whatever you shared together, that God was at the center of it.

I am also grateful that – for years - Libby would bring me a poinsettia at Christmastime. Because now, every Advent season, I make sure to have one in my home, and I look at it and think of her, and feel a measure of that grace.

Even now.... Just thinking about her.....don't you feel a warmth in your heart? And despite our grief, there's a brightness in the soul.

Libby, indeed, lived these words of scripture. She earned “good standing for herself” for she truly was a saint of this church. And there is no question about her boldness in the faith of Jesus Christ. With each smile, with each deed of kindness, with her words of love poured out with a beautiful, warm North Carolina drawl, Libby fulfilled the command of Jesus: “to love one another, as I have loved you.”

Libby was a wonderful woman to have known and cared for, and cared with; an inspiration in faith and service.

The very first words in the Deacon orientation materials reads:

For those who love people and want to follow in the ministry of Jesus Christ, there is no better office to assume than that of deacon in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A.

And the closing words read: *that deacons are people persons who represent the heart of the church.*

Elizabeth “Libby” Wolf truly represented the heart of this church.

For her witness, for her service, for her faithfulness, for her love --- thanks be to God.

Sanctus

From *A Service of Witness to the Resurrection* for Elizabeth “Libby” Wolf (1925-2021)

November 20, 2021

Rev. Kenneth E. Kovacs, Ph.D.
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Psalm 100

The text that comes to mind when I think of Libby is Psalm 100. I can't tell you how many times Libby said to me that she *loved* the church and its people. I can't tell you how many times she told me that she *loved* music and songs of praise. And both loves are joined together here in worship. I love the story she told about her mother, who had a boarding home in Durham, North Carolina, for students attending Duke. She always made sure that the young men in her house put on their Sunday best and went to church Sunday mornings. If you lived in her home, you went to church.

Libby went to church. Libby and Fred went to church. Almost every Sunday, they were here. Even during the pandemic, when we went virtual, they were with us in spirit on a Sunday morning, watching from home. Church matters. Worship matters. Neither duty nor obligation, but something else. Living within the life of the church, worshipping with God's people, being with God's loving people, having fun with God's people, laughing with God's people, cooking for God's people, baking sheet cakes for God's people gave Libby enormous joy and delight. She said to me, “I *love* my church. I *really love* my church.” “I don't know how people get by without the church. I really don't.” And I would agree with her.

Libby had a heart, a dear heart full of gratitude. Gratitude for God's grace and love, gratitude for the life of the church and its people. There was deep, profound gratitude for Fred, for their love, their life, the years they shared, for Fred's tireless support and care for Libby and Libby often said she was blessed by such love. Gratitude filled her heart, and you knew it, and she was not afraid to say it. And that gratitude led her into the courts of the Lord.

“Worship the Lord with gladness,” the psalmist declares, “come into God's presence with singing.... Enter God's gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to God, bless God's name” (Ps. 100:2,4).

And it was through singing that she offered her grateful heart to God and to God's people. As we know, Libby loved to sing. She loved music. She loved choirs. She loved singing in the choir. She loved singing in our choir. It touched her deeply. And the joy—it filled her soul. The morning I met with Fred to talk about Libby's memorial service, I pulled out their membership card in the office. The card records when Fred and Libby joined CPC—they transferred here from Towson Presbyterian Church in 1989—and lists all the boards they served on over the years. I flipped it over to see if there was anything else on the back. And there was. I discovered that Shirley, our office administrator, wrote these words at Libby's request: “At Libby's Memorial Service she'd like the choir to sing “Sanctus”

(*Requiem*) by Gabriel Faure.” Libby. Here are the words of the Sanctus from Faure’s *Requiem*: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory, hosanna in the highest.” Well, we couldn’t quite pull that off today. Today is the first time choir members have been able to sing together in worship in nearly two years. What the choir will sing, Dan Forrest’s arrangement of “[The King of Love My Shepherd Is](#)” is equally moving and beautiful. I was moved to tears listening to the choir rehearsing before the service.

Earlier this morning, I listened to the Sanctus, in honor of Libby. It’s also one of my favorite sections of the *Requiem*. As I listened and thought of Libby, it struck me, I felt it telling that it was this piece, music of exquisite beauty and majesty, of sublime praise to God, that she wanted at today’s service. The Sanctus is an expression, an icon, or image of her heart. “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and heart are full of your glory.” I invite you listen to the Sanctus later today. There are countless recordings of it online. (Here is [one](#) arrangement recently recorded by the choral ensemble VOCES8.) Listen and think of Libby.

What we will sing at the close of the service today is Libby’s favorite hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” – EIN’ FESTE BURG – Martin Luther’s rousing hymn of hope and confidence in God’s faithfulness to all generations. “For the Lord is good;” the psalmist affirms, “God’s steadfast love endures forever and God’s faithfulness to all generations” (Ps. 100:5).

I like to think of Psalm 100 as the Presbyterian Psalm. To me, it captures the joy and praise of the Christian life expressed in the Presbyterian/Reformed tradition. We’re certainly not alone in this, of course, but it’s something near and dear to our hearts. Grace and gratitude. Steadfast love. Thanksgiving. Praise. Assured of God’s sovereignty over the universe and our lives, assured of God’s undying faithfulness to us, we are free to offer up our hearts and voices in grateful praise and our lives in grateful service. We are free to offer worship worthy of the God who is sovereign and faithful and good. Free to worship God with joy, with gladness, eager to come into God’s presence with singing and God’s courts with praise and thanksgiving. For we belong to God. God made us. Our lives are not our own. “We are God’s people, and the sheep of God’s pasture” (Psalm 100:3). And nothing—nothing in heaven or earth—can ever change this fact.

Today, while our hearts are heavy and sad, our tears are also mixed with gratitude and joy—for Libby’s beautiful life, her love, her joy, for the way she touched and changed our lives. And gratitude and joy that, while we see in a mirror dimly, she sees face-to-face, together we share and participate in the life of God who is good, whose steadfast love endures forever, the God who calls our hearts to sing with thanksgiving and praise.

Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy—enter into the *song*—of your Lord. *Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Hosanna, indeed.*