

Wanda Mitchell Memorial Service – June 20, 2014

Prelude music -- Margie

Welcome, opening remarks:

We welcome you this morning on behalf of Wanda's family, and the people of First Presbyterian Church.

We often start events like this with some sort of narrative rundown of a loved one's legacy. Names, dates, events, who, and whose. These usually take up about 4 column inches of newsprint.

Wanda's legacy doesn't fit into four column inches. Wanda Mitchell was the matriarch of an amazing family I've known for nearly 20 years. An amazing family that always seems about a 10 second countdown from ignition. I think now about when that countdown literally reached zero at Michael and Meagan's wedding. And the minister and priest put out the fire. Literally. Ask someone who was there if you don't know the details. And I've always thought that Leah's arrival a few months later – with that full head of red hair - was both an intriguing metaphor, and fair warning – this bunch has a LOT of energy. And a LOT of fun.

We call them by name and are gratefully certain that the apples didn't fall far from the tree. Kim and Rich. Macee, Russ, Leah, and Luke. Meagan, Michael, Matthew and Jacob. Mitchell and Lauren. Kelly, David, Dylan and Hillary. Pat, Allison, Mache, Matt, and Sutton. Sully

You are the keepers of the flame.

We begin by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and in communion with the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer: Our God of grace and glory, we remember and honor Wanda today and we thank you for giving her to us to know and to love. By your compassionate presence, console us in our mourning. Inspire in us the confidence of a certain faith, the comfort of holy hope, and the peace which passes all understanding; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Scripture readings – Elizabeth

Psalm 121

**I lift up mine eyes unto the hills. From whence cometh my help?
My help cometh from the Lord, who made the heavens and the earth.
He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.
The Lord will watch over your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and for evermore.**

Psalm 23

**The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul.
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake
Ye though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.
Thou annointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life.
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

About Wanda – Elizabeth

We meet today begrudgingly, to celebrate the grand, colorful and never-boring life of Wanda Mitchell and to officially give this tender-hearted, hard-headed, fun-loving and cantankerous soul back to you, O God. While it has been difficult to accept that Wanda's health went from bad to worse when she went to the hospital in May for knee-replacement surgery, we know that life was never the same for her after Mike died and in recent months, our ever-feisty Wanda was becoming more frail and fragile.

Wanda would not have grown old gracefully and on this day we are thankful that she was able to live life fully and passionately and always on her terms. When it became clear that all of her medical options had been depleted and her body could no longer sustain life as she knew and loved, Wanda made it crystal clear to all of us that she was not afraid to die, she wanted the ventilator removed and the chance to go to her beloved home to die in peace with her family at her side---from her years of going to Las Vegas and having great fun gambling, Wanda truly knew "when to hold and when to fold."

The phrase, "God broke the mold" when Wanda was born has probably never been more accurate. Wanda was an only child and she came from a long line of very strong, capable and determined women. When I visited with the many friends who sat vigil at her home these last few weeks and reminisced about Wanda over cocktails and with tears and great laughter, it became obvious that I would be somewhat limited in what I would actually be able to share in public about her many interesting escapades and opinions. Wanda's childhood friend, Judy Jackson probably knows most of Wanda's secrets and told us about the time Wanda and Judy caught the woman who owned the local drug store with a man who was not her husband on a country road and they never again had to buy another malt when they went to the drug store in Stamford! Wanda and Mike had a wonderful, exciting and adventurous life together and I was told that Wanda was crazy about Mike Mitchell from the very first time she met him. Legend has it that they were both at a dance and Mike was with another girl and they had gone

to Mike's car and Wanda followed them and opened the car door, I'm sure at a timely moment, and asked the young woman, "What are you doing with my husband?"

After Mike got over this shock, they began dating while Wanda was still in high school and also dating another young man, a football star from Abilene. Wanda had some explaining to do one night when Mike picked up this young man who was hitchhiking to Stamford. As they were visiting, Mike asked him where he wanted to be taken and the young man said, "you can drop me off at my girlfriend's house!"

One of the wonderful things about Wanda was that you never had to wonder what she was thinking or how she was feeling and we always knew just where we stood with her at any given time! She could embrace you with affection and frivolity or "rip you a new one" if needed. Wanda was loving, kind and life affirming and she never met a stranger! Wanda opened her heart and home to many of us through the years and in her embrace, you experienced much laughter, comfort and care. A few days before Wanda died I visited her and she was mumbling to herself and not very coherent. I sat beside her and told her I had heard she had been talking to her beloved mother and I told her I believed that all of her loved ones on the other side would be waiting for her with open arms when she was ready to go and when God decided he was ready to have her! Wanda winked at me as her hired caregiver gasped!

On this day we celebrate with God and the host of saints surrounding all of us that Wanda is now safe at home with her loved ones and that our lives are richer and filled with greater joy because of Wanda's fun-loving, mischievous presence and spunky spirit! Thank you God, for the gift of Wanda Mitchell and for reminding us to live always with passion, love, faith and laughter.

PASTORAL PRAYER AND LORD'S PRAYER

God of Life, Death, and Resurrection, we gather today to give you thanks for Wanda, for the gift of her life and for the many ways her unique, fun-loving and compassionate presence will continue to give us much life and love as well as wisdom, memories and many smiles. We ask that you will be with her family and friends in this time of grief -- offer comfort, strength, peace, love, and hope in ways that continue to affirm life and nurture faith. But we feel more than loss and sadness on this day. We realize, dear God, that our hearts are also filled with an essence of life we would not now have without our having loved and been loved by Wanda. We are grateful for the values, insights, fun and faith we have received from being a part of her life. Thank you, God, for the gift of Wanda and for blessing us through her. As we leave this service, may our sadness and grief be touched by a sense of the joy she had for life, for people, and for You, O Lord. May we be blessed by the remembrances we will always have and like Wanda, may we be open to the adventure of life and the joy of the journey. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gives us life in this world and in the next, let us now pray together, "Our Father..." Amen.

Congregational Hymn: “Amazing Grace.”

Scripture and Sermon - Jerry

John 14:1-3.

Let not your hearts be troubled; believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so would I have told you that I go and prepare a place for you? And when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am, you may be also.

A place prepared. The hospital and hospice worked very hard preparing a place to which Wanda could come home. How fitting. A place prepared – at home.

I’d only been in Texas about a month or two when I learned I had a place prepared in Wanda’s home. Larry usually, or someone from Wanda’s family, would tell me on the way out of church, “Nana’s cooking roast.” And I knew that meant, “get yourself a plate.” There was a place at the table. The table around which there was much laughter and a few lies. Stories and plans. Memories and honors conveyed and celebrated. One Sunday in particular involved the recounting and debriefing of what I think was the most complicated plan and elegantly executed prank I’ve witnessed – before or since. It involved the “boss of the town” featured on the front page of the Post Dispatch on the occasion of her 60th birthday..

Charlcie Mosser had given Wanda that name; it went with a very unflattering picture, and a lot of people were grabbing their backsides that day. Because everyone but Wanda knew there were only a few copies of that version, expertly edited by her loving family. And not without consequence.

You see, you may have a place at the table, but you could get your plate broke. Ask the professor who awarded Macee the second-highest grade in an Honors seminar. By one point. But here’s the deal. Whether literal or metaphorical, when you got a sack-full of broken plate from Wanda – and she was tough enough to let you know when she thought you had that coming – there was always a tube of glue in the bottom. Always. Not always easy to find or easy to use. But what a sweet relief it is when Humpty Dumpty comes back together. You could mend your plate. You still can.

I will always know Wanda in my heart as one of life’s genuine characters. Vividly remembered in many ways. Because she was such a multi-faceted character. Those many details are now her legacy. Her legacy that comes through the multi-faceted characters of her sons and daughters.

Wanda was uncommonly generous with her time and space. If they were home, the door was open and you were welcome. Which makes me think of Sully. Weather forced me to miss the last connection home from Dallas many years ago. And there was no room in the inn. But Sully – who I’d met once if that – offered me safe refuge, breakfast, and a ride to the airport the next morning.

How like Wanda.

Wanda had a soft spot in her heart for people in trouble. I can't count the times Wanda brought food for homebound friends when they were ill, or otherwise in need. Which makes me think of Kelly. Among my most vivid memories of my early days in Post involves Kelly gently caring for Brian Williams at the end of his life. She knew the routine for using oxygen. She checked in, checked on, and gently tended to Brian until quite literally the last moments of his life. How like Wanda.

Wanda was the original "church lady." She prepared the Sunday bulletin, among many other things. My job was to provide the scripture passage and sermon title. By Wednesday at the latest. Or the phone rang. The phone rang a lot. Wanda was organized and dependable.

Wanda also loved to dance. She was determined to dance at Mache's wedding. I'm told she did a little. And throughout her life, she did so a LOT. She never needed a reason to start a party, turn on the music, mix a drink, and start the dancing.

Wanda the church lady – who loved to dance. Which makes me think of Kim, and Pat. Together on this point. Because they are two sides of the same coin. I think it was the party Rex threw for Jo and AC. I've forgotten the occasion. Maybe the occasion was simply the party. In any case, I have the clearest memory of Kim and Pat dancing. Dancing together. Organized, dependable, fun-loving and carefree. How like Wanda.

We were lucky to have her. Mike especially. They kept each other. They kept after each other. And in these last days, I'm given to understand they've been back in touch. And I believe it. Imagine the homecoming. Mike leading the pack of all the saints in her life. Imagine. All the fixings for vodka tonic. A clipboard. Some dancing shoes. And a meat thermometer. A place prepared. A place prepared for Wanda. Safe at home. Amen.

Vocal Solo: "My Way." Mike Trammel, sung to recorded music.

Prayer and benediction:

I remember Wanda about coming apart with excitement one time when she told me she had tickets to a George Strait concert. I asked, "Who's that?" She looked at me like I couldn't find 'up' with a rocket. But I've since learned that "Amarillo By Morning" is really a metaphor for arriving safe at home. The benediction for today are Wanda's words to live by – posted over the door between the kitchen and the living room. You pass under these words with your vodka tonic.

To honor Wanda, live like this:

Life should NOT be a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in an attractive and well-preserved body, but rather to skid in sideways, chocolate in

one hand, a martini in the other, body thoroughly used up, totally worn out and screaming, "WOO HOO, what a ride!"

Postlude - Margie