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Trinity Episcopal Church

Isaiah 61: 1 – 3 Psalm 121
 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:9 John 14: 1 – 6

**I lift up my eyes to the hills; from where is my help to come?
 My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth...**

**The Lord shall watch over your going out and your coming in,
 from this time forth for evermore.**

These words from Psalm 121 that we read just a few minutes ago express a deep and abiding trust in God, a certainty that God is present in each footstep of the journey. Psalm 121 is one of the psalms known as the “Psalms of Ascent,” ascent as in climbing. These psalms were the psalms that Jewish pilgrims would sing as they returned to the Temple in Jerusalem for festivals from their farms and villages scattered across the eastern Mediterranean. As they began the last part of the journey, the uphill climb towards the city of Jerusalem, their eyes would be fixed on the Temple, God’s dwelling place. These ascent psalms were declarations of faith, but more than that, they were like exclamation points of excitement at being at this point in the journey. Exclamation points of gratitude that God had brought them safely through the journey.

Caroline, I think, lived this psalm. Like many of us, she was a questioner, a ponderer, when it came to matters of faith. She was a participant in the Education for Ministry program for about a year, the first year of which focuses on the Hebrew Scriptures. She would ask “Why?” and “What if...” questions. She would say, “I wonder...” Again like many of us, she wrestled with issues of faith, but her certainty of God’s presence, her certainty that ‘the Lord watched over her going out and coming in’ never really wavered.

Caroline, at least towards the end of her journey, was certain in her beliefs. She had no problem in trusting God with her unknown future. She didn’t fear death; she was ready to join the Communion of Saints, where her mother and father and others awaited her. Caroline was ready to die, because she knew that death does *not* have the final word. And she knew that she was going home, and that God was seeing her safely through the journey.

In today’s Gospel reading from John, Jesus is trying to say goodbye to his friends and disciples and prepare them for what’s coming, because he knows that he is about to be arrested, tried and crucified. He is going to die. But they don’t really understand. So Jesus tries a little different tack – he says he’s going away; he’s going home. He’s going away to be with God. But he’s still being a little too cryptic for them.

Thomas speaks up on behalf of all of them and says, “Lord, no, we do not know where you’re going. How can we know the way?” Thomas sounds so much like Caroline to me in this passage. Frank and to the point. It takes courage for him to say what he’s thinking. And it’s one of the things I truly admired about Caroline: her authenticity, her willingness to be herself, to say what she was thinking, to ask whatever she wanted to know.

Jesus, in trying to reassure the disciples, lets them know that there's room for everyone in God's Kingdom; in his father's house there are many rooms. Perhaps for Caroline, that means that there's a room especially for all her craft supplies and partially completed projects.

When God created Caroline, God gave her a double dose of creativity and artistic abilities. Caroline was a nurturer, and for her, that meant being completely devoted to her daughters, Kit and Margaret, her husband, Jim, and her sisters, Susan and Sarah. Some of that devotion was lived out in her various creative endeavors that she did for them – sewing and scrapbooking and knitting. Some of those nurturing gifts also got used when she worked as an administrative advisor to students, helping them negotiate the various hurdles and opportunities of academia. Caroline loved people, and she was fascinated by them. Her compassion for others ran deep. And she could tell some stories! One of the many ways in which Caroline found God in this world was through Creation – especially in watching birds. God blessed Caroline with an inquisitive and caring nature that was with her the whole journey long.

Death, like birth, is a process, a journey, between life as we know it and life as we *don't yet* know it. For a Christian, death is a transition marked by an overarching - and undergirding - sense that there is so much more awaiting us. It is a holy time, a time of touching the sacred, a time of lifting that thin veil which right now obscures our clear vision of the Kingdom of Heaven. Death is a liminal place.

So we do not lose heart, as Paul writes in his letter to the Corinthians. The process of dying becomes the crossing over of a threshold to something new. Death points to, and finds its meaning in, what lies beyond: being raised as a new creation to eternal life with God. New, resurrected life cannot happen without the gift of death, which cannot happen without the gift of life. When all is said and done, death points to God, the giver of life, and to the hope, the joy and the grateful anticipation of new life given in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This hope is not hope in the sense that we usually use it, such as "I really hope I pass that test!" Rather, it is hope as an expression of confident trust in the promises of God. It is hope manifested in the ultimate peace that comes from letting go enough to place ourselves in that trust, just as Caroline did. Caroline lifted her eyes to the hills and knew exactly where her help was coming from: the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. And just as with Caroline, the Lord shall watch over *our* going out, and one day, *our* coming in as well. Which is why, even at the grave, we make our song, "Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!"

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