

A Good Word for Janice Lannin
December 9, 2006

We gather here today to worship God and to give thanks for the life of Janice Wallace Lannin. I will confess that I didn't know Janice. What I know of her is from a few brief visits in a hospital where anxiety and bad news were her constant companion. Her children let me in on the fact that she was forthright and tended not to sugar-coat anything. She was a "tell it like it is" kind of a woman. She could do it sometimes with a little dry sense of humor. I did see that for myself. I had on a bright Christmas sweater the day before she died. As I was leaving her room she said, "Why don't you wear something bright next time!" I loved that. Today under this robe, I have on the brightest red jacket you can imagine. I wore it for Janice.

She was a strong disciplinarian and taught her children right from wrong. Her life was not one of ease. Living life was hard work for her, but as I sat and listened to her daughters talk, I was sure of one thing: she raised them right – and their brother too. She raised them in a way that brings healing to the living of her life. She gave them to one another and they have created homes and families of their own, and that never happens just by accident. So grown children - live your lives well – to the fullest even – that you may know the abundance of goodness which is God's best hope for all of us.

In these kinds of times we long to hear a good word – we need to hear a good word. Well we've come to the right place at the right time – for the Gospel is Good News. In times of grief and sorrow, we need Good News. Each Sunday when this congregation gathers for worship, they hear many different things. But there are three sentences that they hear every single Sunday. These three sentences always come at the end of our time of confession. After a few moments of silence for quiet reflection and

confession, we pray a prayer together, and then one of the ministers offers an assurance of pardon. It's not our pardon that we are offering. Rather we are reminding everyone of the promises of God. Here is what we say: You are loved. You are forgiven. Be at peace. Someone has told us that if they don't hear another thing, that is what they come here each week to hear again and again. As far as I can tell, it's the best news of the Gospel.

Love Perhaps this is the best word of all. Janice was a Child of God – Beloved was her real name. Nothing can change that. Even on the days when we cannot accept it for ourselves, we are loved by God, and that is the best word.

Forgiveness Perhaps this is the best word of all. God's unconditional love for us always brings an offering of forgiveness. Even on the days when we cannot forgive ourselves, we must know that God has the capacity – beyond all our knowing and understanding – to forgive, and that is the best word.

Peace Perhaps this is the best word of all. I prayed with Janice, in the quiet of that hospital room. I touched her hand and prayed that she would know a sense of God's peace. I think she understood that peace was the best word of all - for that is our Blessed Hope – that even today, Janice rests in the abiding love, the gracious forgiveness, and the perfect peace of God Almighty. A Blessed Hope indeed.

I can't think of a better place to utter the Good News than at a memorial service. So I say it today. I say it for Janice. I say it for the family. I say it for me. I say it for all of us:

*You are loved.
You are forgiven.
Be at peace.*

It doesn't get any better than that. Those are the good words. And in them we learn how to offer a word of thanksgiving and celebration for the life of Janice Wallace Lannin. She has been released to a freedom she has never known before. So fear not. Behold there is Good News of great joy for all people. Good News of great joy for Janice. Good News of great joy for her children and grandchildren. Good News of great joy for all of God's people. May it be so. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

We come to you today, O God, offering our thanks for the life of Janice Lannin. In your all-loving nature, you have found a way to love us unconditionally, and we give thanks for that abiding love. Your grace indeed abounds and we find ourselves resting in your peace.

Bring your comfort this day on this family that they may feel a sense of your presence. Give them your love in their sorrow and walk with them in their journey of grief. You know all of our pain, so let your love be their healing balm. In the name of Christ we pray, Amen.