

A Good Word for Nancy Grant
October 16, 2013
Russ Dean

Ecclesiastes 9.7-12

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the paraphrase: family] whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skilful; but time and chance happen to them all. For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them.

John 10.7-10

So again Jesus said to them, 'Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

When I met Nancy she was already well into her battle with cancer, and it was not long into that relationship that I knew I had been cheated. I told her I was sorry we had not had more time to get to know each other; I knew I would have like her a great deal. Apparently everyone did.

Nancy Grant loved life. Sandy said it wasn't just that she had so many interests, and did so many things well – Nancy had passions. *Whatever her hands found to do... [she did] with all her might.* That wonderful text has also been

translated, “*whatever you find... do with all your joy!*” Both interpretations fit Nancy. She poured herself into whatever she found to do; her work was her joy.

That list of joys is encyclopedic. As a child she started making terrariums and sand art, which gave way to string art and then macramé. Everyone in the Grant family has at one time owned a macramé owl. What a hoot! She sculpted and created custom lamps, out of most anything – deer antlers, old instruments, broken items and discarded odds and ends. She mastered stained glass, Christmas wreathes, and became an artisan of the floral arrangement. Signature designs in jewelry became famous with friends and family. She made them for special occasions: game day sporting earrings and elegant flute concert earrings. Many were designed with... well, with you in mind. And did I say that she knew the window treatment. You know, we used to call them curtains, and I’ve always thought “window treatment” was a bit pretentious, but Nancy Grant never made a curtain. “Window treatment” is hardly a pretentious description of a work of art! Every piece in every medium was unique (except maybe for the macramé owls!) It wasn’t just enough to learn how to do something well. Everything Nancy created bore her own, individual touch.

Nancy had heard Judy talking about the mayhem that overtakes her Boston neighborhood for Halloween – a thousand tricker treaters is not uncommon. So Nancy decided that one long-haired, Fairy Princess should migrate from the South to show a bunch of Yankees how to get dressed up for a party! She was the hit of

the night. Many of the kids were awe-inspired – this Fairy had to be the real thing, the wings, the mask, the twinkling wand... from head to toe that fairy princess fashion was Nancy-passion. She was the embodiment of the work that was her joy on that night. You should see the pictures.

Nancy's life was innovative. She colored outside the lines. She was unconventional. Remember those words, please.

It's the rare right-brained individual who also knows PVC (that's plumbing plastic), is familiar with the electrical breaker box in her own house, and who covets the Kobalt socket wrenches her brother-in-law is flaunting. So while the right side saw a creative way to do everything, the left side saw the one way to fix anything in sight. When she remodeled her house some years ago she served as her own General Contractor, absent the official certification to do so. She designed, and she wired ceiling fans and lights; she hung and finished dry wall. As a girl she was "Sanford's side kick;" all those years of following her daddy around, his shadow obviously left a mark.

So, there's the right brain and the left brain, and anyone who can do double-entry accounting is out of their mind. Nancy was that, too. She was careful and consistent, perceptive and precise. She put her Chapel Hill degree in "bidness administration" to good use. Her quick mind made her as valuable an employee as she was a beloved friend. After Dub struggled through three options of Medicare supplemental plans, Nancy quickly read them and made a simple outline of their

differences, and two clean columns of advantages and disadvantages. And she did this even after she was feeling the deteriorating effects of her disease. Left brain. Right brain. All brain... whatever your brain finds to do, do it with all your might!

It would be easy for someone with this many gifts to take herself too seriously, but Nancy had a wonderful wit. Years ago when one of The Grant Girls, as they are known, turned 40, Nancy became the writer, producer, and director of what became a delightful family tradition: a movie in honor of the celebrant. At her initiative the Grant clan had a wonderful time making these comedies, and they will stand as a tribute to her love for family and her good humor. Sandra told us that as she was reading through some of Nancy's written plans for this very service, Nancy had scribbled near the bottom of the page those immemorial words from the old "Airplane" movie series, "Don't call me Shirley..." and then she had written, "Cracked myself up!"

Through our conversation together this week I kept hearing the word "nickname," and then Judy finally just broke down read the whole list. Nancy had this thing for nicknames, and she had acquired more names, as they say, than Carter has pills. Her childhood baby-talk turned "Brenda" into "B-Doe"... so "B-Doe" returned the favor for her little sister, "Nunu." And then "Nunu" became "Baby Doll" to some and "Newberry" others. And "Shrewberry" and just "Berry." Somebody called her "Magnolia," another, "Sunshine." She was "Nancy P" and "PP" and plain old "P." And the sister formerly known as Nunu also became B-I-P-

I and NGO and B-I-N-G-O and Nunu de Lapettit. I'm not finished. "Number 4" was also known to some as "Nunu G," and then after listening to the meteorologist she became "El Nunu" and to others she was "The Nance," or just "N." She went through this long list for Judy, and then she said, "The majority of these don't really mean anything, but they were fun while they lasted!"

One of the Bible's ancient proverbs says, "*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold*" (Proverbs 22.1).

Nancy had many, wonderful, long-time, devoted friends. And each one of them knew her by name. Her own, special, good name. What a wonderful gift, to her and to them.

I asked for one word to describe this woman of many names and they said, "Insightful," "Innovative," "Determined," "Family," "Strong-Willed" (which was just a nicer way of identifying Pauline's stubborn streak!), and then Sandra said her one word was "The Best of Us All." One word. "We all have some good traits... but she's the best of us all, rolled up into one word." I'd love to think either of my siblings could say anything like that about me when I die.

But these are no ordinary siblings. They will forgive me if I have bragged too much, but I'm going to do it again, because you just do not find family like this every day. Amy and I walk the halls of hospitals every day that are filled with patients in empty rooms... and for the last two years, through Pauline's illness and Nancy's, the road has been hot from all over Mecklenburg County, and from

Kentucky, and the air has been filled with jets bound from Boston... Amazing. For Nancy's last days her siblings were all there. When nurses arrived, they pulled out their notebook, to make sure all the medications were given, all the comfort that could be administered had been administered. And when Nancy died, that sat vigil. I entered a holy room on Sunday morning, the five Grant girls there, in silence, but still together. It doesn't happen like that often. Sandra, Diane, Brenda, Judy, thank you. *Well done, good and faithful servants.* Well done.

The book of Ecclesiastes is not appreciated by everyone. It does not offer traditional spirituality, words of easy belief, or comforting bumper sticker theology. Instead, it's honest enough to look at life in all its difficulties and say: this is just the way it is. Everything is vanity... and then you die. Don't try to figure it out, just enjoy life while you can. As I asked Nancy's sisters about her faith, and as I thought about several conversations I had with her, I thought of the book of Ecclesiastes – because it made it into the scriptural canon – but it did so precisely because it offered a different way to think about life and faith and fairness and God. I think Nancy's life and her faith are in the book of Ecclesiastes. Life isn't fair. We should not be standing here today. But life, while it lasts, can show us God. Work hard. Eat, drink, be merry. Laugh. Cry. Love. Die.

And God is in it all.

I'm not the kind of minister who will stand here on a day like today and give you trite platitudes and easy religion – God's will and she's in a better place and all that. What I will give you is the uncommon wisdom of the Preacher of Ecclesiastes, and Nancy Grant's life as exemplary of that theology. Nancy's life as it was: innovative... coloring outside the lines... unconventional – in a beautifully holy way. Nancy was like too many who had left the church because of the church, but her life made it clear that she never left her faith. Everything her hands found to do, she did with passion and joy, and unlike some who live twice as long, she knew in her few years the *abundant life* that Jesus was all about.

For Nancy Pauline Grant. Thanks be to God!

AMY: Generous – gift closet, sent “boxes of love” to Judy in Boston

Lake: first time she ever tried she came up on 1 ski and was cutting and spraying

by the end of the run

Took care of others... even when they were packing up stuff for he to go to the hospital or the hospice house she wanted to make sure Judy had all her stuff...