

The Rev. Kerith Harding's Sermon in celebration of the life of Frances Kikumoto
December 1, 2017

There was a joy in Frances Kikumoto.
There was a zest for life and a love for people.
There was deep enthusiasm for conversation and for friendship.
There was a twinkle in her eye and a drawl in her voice.
But mostly, in Frances there was a wisdom.

Scripture describes wisdom personified — notably and fittingly as a “she” — this way:

“Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; in every **generation she passes into holy souls** and makes them friends of God, and prophets.”

Frances was a true friend of God, and I have proof.

Throughout my five years here, I've seen many new faces walk inside these walls and worship with us for the first time. Frequently, in these folks, a nervousness is palpable. Many of us can remember when we started at a new school or walked into a party by ourselves, or a classroom after many years. You are never really sure what awaits when you are walking into something new, and you hope it isn't awful.

But coming to church for the first time is altogether different. Many are seeking out a scared space, they are responding to a tender nudge inside of them that is pushing them in even when their own feet aren't so confident. They harbor a very real, but vulnerable hope that they are right, that this is where they were meant to be that day. They're nervous because they feel beckoned by something and someone they didn't know they missed, but whom they are realizing has missed them too.

As the pastor, I am always hyper-aware of the liturgy on days with newcomers. How was the sermon? Was I boring? Was the music uplifting? [Did someone offer an inappropriately long or politically motivated thank offering?] I hope we see these seekers again, and I hope to not give them an excuse or a reason not to return.

And, when they do return I like to ask them what brought them back. “The people were very welcoming,” they will say. “I felt welcomed.”

I press them a bit and ask, “Oh, who did you get to talk to?”

And 9 times out of 10, they will say, “Frances.”

They came back because of Frances.

They come back because a fragile woman with a cane eyed them across the room, and made her way over;

Because somewhere in Frances’ heart, she knew being new anywhere is hard, but that being new at church means you are looking for God again.

And Frances was God’s good friend,

and she would make sure they felt God just a bit before they left.

Just enough to come back.

I know there are many here who are in no hurry to pass on to their heavenly reward, but who are comforted by the notion that when they do, the consummate welcomer and emulater of the Good Shepherd, will be there to greet you.

My wife, Ali, tells a story of feeling absolutely stripped to the bone by our first year as parents, when Francis grabbed her by the hand right before Christmas and handed her a small package, and insisted she open it right there.

It was a pair of socks that said “Believe,” and had green and red martini glasses on them.

Francis said, “I saw these and I immediately thought of you.”

Ali will say it was the first time she laughed all week.

And Ali knew these socks were as much from Francis as they were from God, a gentle reminder to put her feet up, to believe it would get better.

And hey, maybe a martini wouldn’t hurt!

Francis was God’s friend, bringing others a step closer to God so that God could love them with exuberance and enthusiasm.

Our service tonight is at sunset — and this was the only request Francis made about her funeral. The music, the readings — she wasn't particularly concerned. But our goodbye to Francis had to be at sunset.

So here we gather at the end of the day nearing the time when Frances' earthly life ended and her new life began. Your day leading up to this moment may have been long and arduous, or it may have been joyful and relaxing — either way Frances could relate. She had her share of both of those. Her life and everything she experienced from Mississippi to Nevada to L.A. to Maui was colorful, and prophetic, and joyful, and sad, and full.

These past months, as Frances' life was coming to a close, it seemed she was learning that the end of life is sometimes where all the beauty we *worry* we've left behind comes to find us again. And like a radiant Hawaii sunset at the end of the day, the conclusion of the journey is sometimes its most beautiful part.

I didn't know Francis as a young woman, but I can say with gratitude, that in her final years and weeks, Francis was as radiant as the setting sun.

Rest in peace, Francis.
AMEN.