

A SERVICE OF WITNESS TO THE RESURRECTION

in loving memory of

**Mary Beth Blaskey**

September 23, 1936 – November 14, 2012



Saturday, December 8, 2012

2:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
OF SAN BERNARDINO

A Service of Witness to the Resurrection  
in memory of  
Mary Beth Blaskey

MINISTER: THE REVEREND DR. SANDRA R. TICE  
PARISH VISITOR: THE REVEREND NOÉ FALCONI  
ORGANIST: CAROL COOPER

PRELUDE

OPENING SENTENCES

PRAYER

WORDS of REMEMBRANCE

A READING

SCRIPTURE      Ecclesiastes 9:11-12  
                     Psalm 32:18-19  
                     Matthew 27:57-61  
                     2 Corinthians 1:3-4

WORDS of COMFORT and HOPE

HYMN 280                      *Amazing Grace*

PRAYER and LORD'S PRAYER

COMMENDATION

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

**GREET EACH OTHER- (she would want us all to feel welcome!)**

### **WORDS OF REMEMBRANCE**

**Mary Beth Mussen Blaskey**, as anyone who knew her will attest, was profoundly generous, terrifically funny and deeply kind. She was smart and faithful and strong. She was full of gratitude and delight.

**We know that she died violently, but we will not let that be what defines her memory-**we will not deny the horror of it, but we will not let it replace the laughter and light of her life.

**Part of what we gather to do today is to recall and celebrate and give thanks for her goodness,** the Gift of God she was to the world and to us. So let us remember for a few minutes.

**Mary Beth was Young at Heart, and had a certain Naivete-** she took delight in many things: flowers, kittens, friendship. The gift of each new day. She loved God and she loved to do good in the world. She loved cookies and beauty and honest conversation. She loved coffee and chocolate and beautiful music. Her email name was “Messy Bear”, a nickname that came from a child mispronouncing MaryBeth- and she kept that happy accident as part of her identity all her life.

**Struggles-** she faced challenges in her life, not least of which was the one that brought her here. When she was 16 and about to enter her senior year in High school, her father, Rev. Dr. Richard Mussen heard a call to move from their home in Washington DC to serve as pastor of this church, here in California. It was the last thing she wanted to do. But she did it. And she did the other difficult but necessary things life asked of her: relocating often when husband Larry’s work required it; later navigating divorce and single-parenting; facing addiction and sobriety; walking beloved ones (her mother Lenore, and also beloved ‘Charlie Brown’) through illness and up to the threshold of death. She spent one of the last weeks of her life in the hospital- there were problems with her heart and her arteries, and a procedure was supposed to happen soon to remedy that- and she was a bit

frightened. When struggles came her way, Mary Beth did what was required of her bravely, relying on God, and her sorrows never stole her bright spirit or radiant smile.

**Friend of Kids-** She was the only child in a pastor’s family, and while this provided privileges and opportunity, it also came with high expectations. She sometimes felt conspicuous as a young woman, held to a ‘higher standard’ than others her age. As a matter of fact, she always made it a point to ask about MY kid, (who is also the only child in a pastor-family) and to extend herself in kindness toward her. Her dear cousin Dave’s grandchild said this when she learned of MB’s death: “Who am I going to play Simon Says with?!” He added: “There just aren’t anywhere near enough adults around who always have time for a child.”

A friend in this congregation told me of how she befriended her son when he was a teenager who found himself (how shall I say?) *frequently* visiting the administrator’s office at San G- MB always treated him with respect and kindness, looked him in the eye, called him by name. She always greeted him with enthusiasm when they were off campus, and decades later continued to ask his mother “how is he doing? What is he up to?” It was an enormous gift of grace to this parent and this young man. And she was **a friend to her own kids** (who are now men): Gunner points out “She never, never gave up on me. Never. Even after 17 years as an addict, she never stopped believing I could do it, believing I was worth it.” Dirck points out that she could make all of us feel like we were her “very favorite person in the whole world.”

**She loved family-** Her father was a powerful preacher and revered as pastor here, her mother was extremely well-educated and perceptive, and threw elegant parties. They cherished her. I want to point out that she was particularly close to her 1<sup>st</sup> cousin David (he and his wife Renie cannot be here because of the chemotherapy he is undergoing, but their 2 daughters are here: Claire and Ellie) Also, her cousin the Rev. Stephanie Seachrist (sp) has come all the way from Pennsylvania to honor her, along

with her daughter Jenny from Utah and brother Chuck from NY. Thank you- from our hearts- for joining us today. She loved both her sons, and she and she loved the women who loved *them*

**She also loved her adopted and chosen 'families':** the church family here at First Pres, the workplace community at San G (and other schools over the years), and the morning meeting/Tuesday meeting/and Friday meeting family that walked with her through 21 years of sobriety.

**She showed up and did the work.** She went to her meetings almost every day. She was a part of the "Corsairs" group here at church, and helped serve coffee and tea and donuts after worship. They will serve coffee and cookies to you in her honor this afternoon. She was elected as a member of our Session, and just finished serving as chair of our nominating committee (she helped identify the 10 people God is calling to lead this congregation in the next 3 years.) We are in her debt. If Mary Beth said she would do it, you could count on her.

**MB was Funny-** you know this. She could be impish. She could be sly. She loved to grin and could clown around. And she loved giggle and to chuckle and also to laugh out loud. She was a person who sought and celebrated joy. She and the boys laughed a lot growing up- she used to take NOTES on the misadventures of particular vacations, and then laugh uproariously about them later 😊

**She loved Music.** She had perfect pitch, could name a note if you played a piano key. Her favorite classes in high school were English and Choral Music- she got A's. Somewhere there is a 78rpm recording of her singing 'O Holy Night' (how I would love to hear that!!). She loved the choir here, she loved the organ- more than once she actually climbed the two flights of stairs after worship to say 'thank you'. She also, I am told, loved Metallica (!! 😊)

**She had both class and 'sass'**- she was both dependable and surprising. She loved nice things and used the crystal candy dishes. She cut camellias and roses and kept them in the house. She had good manners. She also occasionally used 'colorful' language, preferred a modern haircut, and spoke her mind.

**Sensitive.** The ability to know what someone needed to hear, what would encourage or strengthen another's heart, what would give hope or joy. And not only could she figure that out, but she followed through in saying the faith-building, hope-inducing thing. "THANK you, Sandy." And then proceed to express thanks for something she appreciated. She was a terrific conversationalist, listening intently and asking gentle, focused questions to help you hear yourself. She could listen.

**We are her witnesses today:** we bear witness to a life lived in generosity, a life that was about healing and laughter and joy. We remember you with tenderness, Mary Beth, your love for beauty and your willingness to serve, your decision to be grateful and faithful. We remember the laughter, the words you said that we needed to hear. We will not forget you, or how you lived.

(You will have stories of your own...come join us in Fellowship Hall and share them-)

### **WORDS OF COMFORT AND HOPE** (Reflections on scripture)

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12

This is not God's will, this is not her fault. First of all, notice that the rain falls on the just and the unjust. Calamity befalls us all. This is the nature of life on earth: there is beauty and joy; but also sorrow and cruelty and death. And suffering is not the fault of the sufferer. This evil is not something God visited upon MB or those of us who love her. It is injustice, it is evil. And it is perfectly reasonable for our hearts to say "NO!"

God is with us in our sorrow and grief. Matthew 27:57-61

The Christian gospel has, at its center, a horrific story of an innocent person who died by violence. This story has often made me uncomfortable- it is unpleasant and full of pain and mostly I would much rather preach Jesus taking children on his knee than Jesus broken on the cross. But in these weeks, I have been comforted by the fact that God goes before me into this unbearable place, and that I am accompanied there by the Holy One. The story of Jesus' death includes the image of Mary seeing the body of the One she loved most in all the world, an experience that nothing in her life has prepared her for. God is with us here, friends, as we grieve this loss, and God shares our sorrow.

**The Christian gospel has, at its center, this dreadful story. And it also has the proclamation that though horror and the suffering happen even to the best of us, they are NOT the end.**

Goodness is *stronger* than evil, love is *stronger* than hate, light is *stronger* than darkness, life is *stronger* than death. Jesus, who was broken, is also the one who says to us, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." The God to whom we cry out in our sorrow both MEETS US HERE, and BEGINS OUR HEALING, whenever we are ready.

God offers us healing

**Mary Beth knew something about healing, about Resurrection.**

As someone who had worked the 12 steps passionately for over 20 years, she knew about help for the helpless, and hope for the powerless. She knew something about choosing to embrace and lean on her Higher Power in times of despair and pain, and in so doing being made Whole. Today, as we experience our own helplessness- our own inability to go back to the 3 weeks and erase this- our fury, our dismay, our sadness and our fear- God offers us a space of safety and refuge and a process of healing. All of you know, I think, that there is nothing I can say today to make this go away. But I can vouch for this: God is real, and God's love is sufficient even for these unbearable things. We can

take refuge in God's love now, and we can work in partnership with God's grace for our own healing and peace.

*Psalm 34:18-19 God is near to the brokenhearted, and will save the crushed in spirit.*

Hear these lyrics from "We Cannot Measure How You Heal":

*We cannot measure how you heal,  
Or answer every sufferer's prayer;  
Yet we believe your grace responds  
Where faith and doubt unite to care.  
Your hands, though bloodied on the cross,  
Survive to hold and heal and warn,  
To carry all through death to life and cradle children yet unborn.*

*The pain that will not go away,  
the guilt that clings from things long past,  
The fear of what the future holds,  
Are present as if meant to last.  
But present too is love which tends  
The hurt we never hoped to find,  
The private agonies inside, The memories that haunt the mind.*

*So some have come who need your help,  
And some have come to make amends  
As hands which shaped and saved the world  
Are present in the touch of friends.  
Lord, let your Spirit meet us here  
To mend the body, mind and soul,  
To disentangle peace from pain  
And make your broken people whole*

-John Bell & Graham Maule, Iona Community

**Mary Beth was baptized in Christ, and belonged to him.** Her death, no matter how unexpectedly or wrongly it arrived, only completes this baptism- she belongs to Christ, who said, "no one can snatch my sheep out of my hand." She is held now in mystery, by the One in whom she placed her trust.

2Corinthians 1:3-5

God comforts us so we may become comforters

The Apostle Paul tells early Christians who have known grief that God comforts us

And also that the purpose of this comfort is so that we, ourselves, might share it: might comfort others with the same comfort with which we ourselves have been soothed and healed and encouraged. And with that in mind, I would like to share with you

Words that have given me deep comfort these last few weeks. In September, MB came to an evening service for healing and wholeness- the first one she'd attended. It was a time when we brought our sorrow and pain to God, and asked for healing and grace. That evening, Mary Beth sent me an email saying Thank You. She said:

**"I walked out of the sanctuary as if my feet were not quite touching the ground!**

**A spiritual, calm quiet had descended on me from head to toe - anxiety gone, replaced by a feeling I can only describe as.....**

**"God's in his heaven, all's right with the world."**

May we walk out of this sanctuary knowing that God is comforting us, and that we can have comfort to share. Amen.

“The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain. Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven? And is not the lute that soothes your spirit the very wood that was hollowed with knives? When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.”

- *The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran

Ecclesiastes 9

<sup>11</sup> 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 those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all.

<sup>12</sup> For man does not know his time. Like fish that are taken in an evil net, and like birds that are caught in a snare, so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them.

## Matthew 27

<sup>57</sup> As evening approached, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who had himself become a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body, and Pilate ordered that it be given to him. <sup>59</sup> Joseph took the body, wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, <sup>60</sup> and placed it in his own new tomb that he had cut out of the rock. He rolled a big stone in front of the entrance to the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there opposite the tomb.

## Psalms 34

<sup>18</sup> The Lord is near to the brokenhearted  
and saves the crushed in spirit.  
<sup>19</sup> Many are the afflictions of the righteous,  
but the Lord delivers him out of them all.

## 2 Corinthians 1

<sup>3</sup> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. <sup>5</sup> For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too.

<http://marybeth.blaskey.org>

<http://fpcsb.net>