

Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life."

Today's gospel lesson might not be familiar to you. We never hear this lesson in our three-year cycle of Sunday readings. See, we Episcopalians don't like to be reminded there's a judgment, an accounting coming when we die. What we trust and hope and pray for is that when we die, we **pass from death to life**, to eternal life, and that our new reality after we die is in a good place.

We Episcopalians believe in life after death. And we tend to place our trust in a loving God, in God's mercy trumping his judgment. We hope and trust that the God who made us, the God who loved us each so much he came in person to be with us, that THAT God will say to us in the end, "Well, you got some things very wrong, but I have made all things right. Be well and come on home!"



Yes, we believe in God's mercy. But sometimes we are afraid there might be judgment coming when we **pass from death to life**. But we don't KNOW FOR SURE what's next after this life, do we?

There's a cartoon I just love about what might be next when our life takes a major transition. Those who know me for any length of time have heard of this cartoon before. But I want to share the image with you who are Nancy Willis' family and friends.

The cartoon is an image of two babies, two fetuses, in the tight confines of their mother's womb. And the twins are having a deep conversation about this very subject, about what might be coming after they are born. One baby is asking the other, "Do you think there's life after birth?" And the other is answering, "NO, THIS is all there is to life. After all, no one's ever come back here from birth to let us know."

We, of course, know there's life after birth. We are living proof of life after birth. What we're often not so sure about is whether there's life after death.

Christ Jesus taught us there is life after death, eternal life. And Christ Jesus taught there's nothing to fear about life's major transitions through its phases. In today's gospel lesson, for instance, we hear

Jesus telling his disciples what's required to attain eternal life. Jesus' answer is very short, an uncomplicated list of what we must do to **pass from death to life**. Jesus said that ANYONE who does these two things will live: 1) Hears Christ's word, and 2) believes in the one who sent Christ to us, that person will **pass from death to life**. Jesus added that ANYONE who does these two things not only will attain eternal life but will "not come under judgment."

There you have Jesus' instruction for how to **pass from death to life**: 1) Hear Christ's word, and 2) believe in God.

I'm dwelling on these words of Christ Jesus today because these words affirm that Nancy Willis has passed from death to life, exempt from divine judgment. I believe this with all my being: We know where Nancy Willis is, and why. And even though we grieve Nancy's loss, we miss her and know she has successfully transitioned to be with Jesus. Be not afraid, even though we see her no longer, Nancy has **passed from death to life**.

We can be certain of what I'm saying because Nancy didn't pass from death to life on May 13, the day her physically body ceased to function. Nancy passed from death to life years ago, decades ago, when she heard Christ Jesus' words and believed:

- Believed that she was "dead" though talking and walking here on this earth.
- Believed she could find life again by turning to God, the God of her mother's faith, the God who created her and loved her beyond measure.

See, Nancy had died in a very real way at age 11. That's when Nancy turned to drugs to ease the pain of her life. Decades later, after scrambling through a very hard life, when the adult Nancy "came to herself," as in the Prodigal Son parable that Jesus told, THAT's when Nancy found her way home to God. THAT's when Nancy **passed from death to life**. THAT's when Nancy's eternal life began.

THIS life was very hard for Nancy. She held many jobs but was profoundly poor. She was often very ill, either physically or mentally or both. Nancy first came to Church of the Resurrection to get food. What she also found here was love and community and belonging and the Christ her mother knew. THAT's when Nancy returned to life, eternal life and began living again, living her forever life.

We at Resurrection weren't the source of Nancy's new life, Christ Jesus was and is. WE merely pointed the way, telling our stories of how we had once been dead and how we had been given forever life. We just pointed the way, as didn't Nancy's beloved brother Joe.

And now Nancy points US to God because she beat us “home.” She got there ahead of us leaving behind our memories of her. The lesson Nancy taught US is that we, too can pass from death to life, no matter how dire our living death has become.