

FUNERAL OF HANNA KINO | APRIL 29, 2023

PSALM 23 | ROMANS 8:31-35, 37-39 | JOHN 14:1-6

Tomorrow, many churches will celebrate what we colloquially call “Good Shepherd Sunday.” We will hear Jesus call himself the shepherd who knows his flock, leads them out, and protects them from all that might harm them. We’ll also hear the words of the twenty-third psalm, in which the psalmist famously calls the Lord their shepherd who leads us to green pastures and beside still waters. So it’s fitting that as we gather to celebrate Hanna’s life, mourn her death, and commend her to our merciful redeemer, we hear those same words of comfort. God the shepherd who accompanies us even through the darkest valley.

But it’s fitting for another reason, too. The twenty-third psalm begins with images of shepherds, but halfway through it turns to another image: God the host. Even in the presence of our enemies, even in the shadow of death, God continues to set a table before us. And not a miniscule table to be packed up quick, not a small snack to tie us over, but a table of St. John called “abundance.” A table with enough food to go around. A table where you don’t have to make a reservation. A table that always has room for another chair.

In Hanna’s case, this metaphor might be a little too on-the-nose. I never knew Hanna, never met Hanna. But I’ve been hearing about her for the six years I’ve been serving this congregation. Because every time we I drive with one of my congregants down Wyckoff Ave past Aldo’s, they always look wistfully out the window and say, “You know, there used to be a good bakery there. This one time…” and then the stories start to unspool.

What’s remarkable to me in these comments is that for how much people remember this bakery, they almost never talk about the breads. (Don’t get me wrong. I’m sure the breads were good.) But that’s not what people talk about. They talk about the relationships. The laughter. The mentorship. The hospitality.

People don’t remember Hanna as a baker. Bakers combine ingredients. They have a skill that someone taught them. But it’s a skill that can be replicated. You can teach a computer to bake you a cake or a loaf of bread.

But people remember Hanna as a host. Hosts don’t have some special skill, but what they do have is a disposition. They make us feel welcome and accepted, they make room for us. They convey a sense of grace in their habits and posture toward those around them. And their gifts are impossible to fully replicate, which is why their loss causes us such grief.

This, as the psalmist tells us, is how God acts toward us. We remember that every time we gather around Christ’s table, where all are welcomed with love, fed with mercy, and sent with courage to all the other tables we gather at throughout the week. God sets a table before us even in the midst of our grief and uncertainty and frustration and doubt.

And it is how God empowers us to live for others. As Alan summed it up in his obituary, God empowers us to be “helpful, kind, honest, and [to] live life with a purpose.” Those were the values that marked Hanna’s life, and they are the commitments that we carry with us as we are sent forth from this place today.

Even besides still waters, even in the darkest valley, God sets a table before us. And so the words Hanna spoke to us in life are the same words God speaks to her in death. Welcome.

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