

## 1 of 3

[PRAYER] I cannot think of a time when I have been more honored and privileged to lead a memorial service as a pastor, and I cannot think of a time when I wanted to any less than today. We are here because of our deep and lasting love for Jeanne Beth Willett-King, and we were so deeply honored and privileged to have been loved by Jeanne. We celebrate her love, her amazing joy, her steadfast friendship, her compassion, her humor, her ability to lift us up when we needed it so very much. Dear God, how we wish we didn't have to celebrate it today; but we must. We must celebrate God's goodness in her, goodness that Jeanne offered to us as our way forward, the way that honors Jeanne Beth's life in our own lives, with the God who how offers Jeanne eternal rest and peace.

Family members and friends have already offered their stories of Jeanne Beth's life, far better than I can. What I see in their stories is the same Jeanne who I knew as her pastor, from a different angle. I see in their stories a woman who was so overflowing with love, and joy, that we could not wait for her to show up, bringing us life in her wake. If Jeanne Beth saw a pool of water, maybe she'd sit by it quietly, and reflect a while; maybe she'd slip in, and swim a bit; but, as an ambassador for the joy that came to her from God, Jeanne would more likely shout out with a joyful noise, "Cannonball!!" and jump in with a big ker-splash! Jeanne Beth woke us up when she was with us, making us aware that life is great, and that God-given joy is life's greatest gift of all.

Jeanne was God's joy on earth, walking around. She breathed joy into so many lives, including her beloved family, her husband, John, her church family who loved her like their own family, and four-footed best buddies, like her dogs Diddy and Lincoln, and her four-hoofed friends Jenny, Buddy and Clancy. Jeanne's joy spread out across God's earth in so many efforts to bring hope to people who had lost hope. She loved working for our church, and for non-profits, such as The Cove and After the Storm, with Christine, her brother Bruce's wife. Her commitment to God's joy ran far deeper than a smile in an Easter bunny suit. In my recent sermons on finding God's joy, I have been pointing people towards the deep strengths from God that we need to share that kind of joy: focus, trust, commitment, willingness to change, obeying God, and endurance. If you felt ripples in your heart from God's joy that Jeanne Beth shared with you, this is what they were made of. Real, powerful joy from God has strength, joy that Jeanne was glad to share with you and with God's world, in abundance.

Recently when Jeanne spoke to us about her faith experience in our church, she talked about how we make ripples with our faith. We may not think that what we do has an effect, that we're just like a stone, dropping into the water, never to be seen again. But Jeanne Beth reminded us that stones dropped into the water leave ripples behind, spreading out far, far beyond where we think that our impact is felt. The God-given joy that Jeanne brought us enormous ripples, touching and moving so many lives, so deeply, and so far beyond what she may have thought or felt her impact was.

Jeanne's deep and powerful expression of God's joy on earth took immense courage. She expressed joy with physical confidence, even when she faced physical

## 2 of 3

challenges; she shared deep love and caring, with her family, with her husband John, and friends, and many people who we might find it hard to love, even when she may have had a hard time feeling love for herself; she shared fun times and humor, even when she might have wanted to cry; she tried new things, like getting an MBA degree, and starting a new business focused on creative approaches to sales and marketing, completely from scratch, even when it would expose her to setbacks and disappointments; she helped children to know what it felt like to be loved by God, as if they were her very own children, even when she just wanted to be a child herself.

You see, offering joy that comes from God is taking a chance on God's story being our story. Courage and joy go together. Jeanne Beth stepped out, where others would step back. She said, "You bet, let's try this, just think of the lives we can touch!" when others were comfortable in doing more familiar things, with familiar people. She would hold the hand of a child who she had never known before, while she tenderly dabbed on a decal, and pray silently for that child, as if they were her very own, when most of us cannot look past our own children, or ourselves. Jeanne Beth's joy was truly, truly, a gift from God, love in the middle of life's storms, for everyone.

Jeanne was a deeply Christian person. She loved God, she loved Jesus, and she loved telling the story of God through Jesus. She was an extraordinary Sunday school teacher, treating children as equals in discipleship, and respecting their faith as she nurtured them in God's joy. When she decided to start studying the bible recently, she spread her joy for the good news of God's word like wildfire. She is very well known as our Easter Bunny, but known even more for her great joy in church singing, and acting in our Christmas pageants. She reached out to our community in so many ways for Jesus, touching many people deeply. We haven't just lost a church member: We have lost one of our most deeply cherished friends in faith.

The joy of God in Jeanne Beth has rippled through our lives deeply, like a cannonball hitting the water at full speed. We are profoundly grateful for her life, her love, her joy, and her blessed memory. As we honor Jeanne's arrival in God's eternal kingdom, it is important for us to reflect on what she might want her legacy to be in this world. How do we honor Jeanne Beth in our own lives? We see, in Psalm 100, the key ingredient that we must use to honor Jeanne: make a joyful noise unto the Lord! Serve the Lord with gladness! Enter God's place with praise! Be God's sheep! When Jeanne did this the most, she was her strongest, best self, becoming more than who she was, not just a child of parents, a sister, an aunt, or a friend, but a child of God, filled with God's Holy Spirit. Jeanne showed us how living in God's joy makes a difference in life. To be someone who makes ripples, you have to feel God's ripples, constantly, with others, for as long as you can.

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Pilippians reminds us that Jeanne's legacy of ripples from God is incomplete. God began a good work in her, and God's work is not done. God's joy is incomplete until we take on the same mind and heart that God provided to Jeanne Beth. Seek out the love of God not just on your own, but together.

### 3 of 3

When people call you into God's joy, listen to them, and remember how Jeanne did it. And when you start to feel that joy, be ready to be an ambassador for God's joy, so that others may hear the joyful story of God's love as often as they need to hear it. Human love and friendship is great; but human love and friendship in Jesus is what gives us the strength, and the courage, to endure everything for God's joy. Jesus endured it all humbly for us, to his very end, and so can we, in Jesus.

And finally, our carrying on of Jeanne Beth's legacy of joy is not complete until we turn to Jesus. On the dim light of a hopeless morning, two women went to a grave where they believed Jesus was buried. Matthew's gospel tells us today that an angel of God appeared to them in the empty tomb of Jesus. The angel told them what many of us know: that death is not a period on a life sentence, but a comma in God's never-ending story. These women ran from the tomb with fear, and joy. They were in shock, just as we are today. But they also had joy, just as Jeanne has, today, in God's loving hands. What they did with that fear and joy made all the difference: they ran to share it with others! It is only when they were totally committed to sharing the shocking and amazing news of Jesus rising from the dead that Jesus appeared to them. "Greetings!" he said. Greetings. When we decide to make God's ripples in God's world, when we run to share the good news, like Jeanne Beth did with us, God's joy will be with us, no matter what, and God's world will never be the same.

Jeanne has already had her greeting from Jesus. It is now up to us to prepare for our greeting from Jesus, together. We are saying farewell on this earth to one of God's most powerful creators of God's ripples of joy. But the story of her ripples is not over. [STONE IN WATER] Through you, in Jesus, her story has just begun. Amen.