

Sermon for Joe Stadler's funeral @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore
11 a.m. Saturday, 10 January 2025

Joe's death surprised us.

He mainly left the church-going to Betty, and over my 20-some years as pastor, I knew him most through Betty's reports.

I do have a version of his artistic gifts, which he presented me when I took an extended leave in 2015. I was impressed and honored.

I also remember a beautiful tribute he gave to Betty's life with him, which he stood up and gave to us during moments of sharing in one of his services with us.

Part of our purpose today is to honor him in all the ways we know about. Also to give you all a chance to be grateful for his life, and to say, together, something about the faith we share now, in our experience here of hearing from some of those who do know him well, and who feel the shock and emptiness of his passing.

Letting go is a fundamental human experience, and testifying to that deserves help from the rest of us; and so, also, does honesty with ourselves about the ever-present reality of goodbyes, to each and every one of us, over time.

Our service gives rich resources for all this. Again and again, its beautiful words and thoughts offer us encouragement, and give examples of how to regard such times, and call us to give space for loss at every age we live through. Let us be patient at this work, and generous with our support of each other, and with ourselves, sensitive to the time it takes to live with these qualities of being fully alive, all through our own time and that of others we walk with, and raise, and guide.

There is also time here to bear witness to Joe's effect on us, to his uniqueness, including his ways of surprising us, again and again, as he walked among us. He made his mark, and received his own blessed assurances, and also his painful times, among us. We send him forth on a path we have yet to trod, and when his presence comes alive to us in surprising ways in the days ahead, we ask for help in learning what might not have been clear to us before, but may teach us more of ourselves and more of life from here on.

Let us go forward into reflection on all this, welcoming any comments, and simply allowing quiet if that is what feels best for us. I'll step back, and be here to continue leading as that time comes to us.

Welcome.