

# Don't accept anything as it is...

Dear Lord! kind Lord! Gracious Lord! I pray You will look on all I love, tenderly to-day! Weed their hearts of weariness; scatter every care, down a wake of angel wings winnowing the air. Bring unto the sorrowing all release from pain; let the lips of laughter overflow again; and with all the needy O divide, I pray, this vast treasure of content that is mine to-day! Amen.

*Love's Prayer, James Whitcomb Riley*

AT A CELEBRATION OF ELAINE "WILLI" CAMPBELL  
January 29, 2017

**ST. MARK'S-IN-THE-VALLEY**  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH AND PRESCHOOL

Los Olivos, California

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I have a great gift as a preacher today in that Willi has already preached everything that needs to be said with her life.

What I will offer is a bit of insight into how her life was formed and perhaps a suggestion as to what we can expect now.

As Kathleen will tell you, in her final months and weeks Willi had an interesting way of preparing for today.

She mentioned to Kathleen that she and I should get together to talk – not that she was thinking of leaving or that she was done or anything – but just to check in because, after all, I would be her “Master of Ceremonies.”

In that conversation, as she did with others, she had things waiting.

In my case, she had a book with yellow pages that had been written by her pastor from her girlhood and young woman years when she was growing up in Cleveland, Ohio – a pastor who was also a member of her family, The Rev. John Bruére who, she told me, helped establish in her the character of her faith that would serve her for the rest of her long life.

John Bruére, I came to discover in perusing this book and the various thing that had been stuck into its pages through the years (letters, copies of his sermons and such) was nothing less than an urban prophet who was decades and decades before his time spiritually and theologically.

With very few exceptions or

amendments, I could preach his sermons today.

What resulted from his mentorship for Willi was that her living was her faith – her faith was her living.

She engaged this faith early in her life and it served her for the rest of her life.

Here is the essence of it in a couple of quotes from The Rev. John Bruère:

He wrote: “Every person is interested in religion, because every person is created by God.

“Whether on the Jericho Road or on the battlefields of the Crimea, or at a slave auction in the town square, there has always been an urgent need for the practical religion of a Good Samaritan, a Florence Nightingale, an Abraham Lincoln – a person who could meet desperate situations because that person believed in a religion that works.

“Your town has its Jericho Road that cries for compassion, its battlefields that plead for mercy, its underprivileged citizens who are your personal concern.”

Do you think Willi was paying attention?

Or how about this:

“Where the Spirit of God is, there are miracles. Don’t accept anything as it is. Don’t think that it has to be that way. And don’t let us

ever accept ourselves as we are and thing that we cannot be different.”

Again, she engaged this faith early in her life and it served her and served all of us, served this whole Valley and region, her family, her friends for the rest of her life.

And what now?

John O’Donohue, the Irish Catholic poet, philosopher and teacher wrote extensively about death before his own untimely death in 2008. Here is an extended quotation from his book *Anam Cara* on the topic: *Are Space and Time Different in the Eternal World?*

He writes:

When the soul leaves the body, it is no longer under the burden and control of space and time. The soul is free; distance and separation hinder it no more. [So imagine Willi even more free than she has ever been before!] The dead are our nearest neighbors; they are all around us. The 14<sup>th</sup> century German mystic, Meister Eckhart was once asked, Where does the soul of a person go when the person dies? He said, no place. Where else would the soul be going? Where else is the eternal world? It can be nowhere other than here. We have falsely spatialized the eternal world. We have driven the eternal out into some kind of distant galaxy. Yet the eternal world does

not seem to be a place but rather a different state of being. The soul of the person goes no place because there is no place else to go. This suggests that the dead are here with us, in the air that we are moving through all the time. The only difference between us and the dead is that they are now in an invisible form. You cannot see them with the human eye. But you can sense the presence of those you love who have died. With the refinement of your soul, you can sense them. You feel that they are near.”

So Willi – utterly free – and our nearest neighbor.

And what about us?

In his book *Benedictus* which is also published as *To Bless the Space Between Us* O’Donohue writes:

“If you really live your life to the full, death will never have power over you. It will never seem like a destructive, negative event. It can become, for you, the moment of release into the deepest treasures of your own nature; it can be your full entry into the temple of your soul. If you are able to let go of things, you learn to die spiritually in little ways during your life. When you learn to let go of things, a greater generosity, openness, and breath comes into your life. Imagine this letting go multiplied a thousand times at the moment of

your death. That release can bring you a completely new divine belonging.”

So how about if we, like Willi, live our lives to the full? Live so death has no power over us?

Doesn’t sound likely?

Again, those words from John Bruère that will took to heart: “Where the Spirit of God is, there are miracles. Don’t accept anything as it is. Don’t think that it has to be that way. And don’t let us ever accept ourselves as we are and thing that we cannot be different.”