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Special Worship Service
Ecumenical Institute, Chicago

April 30, 1972

CELEBRATION OF THE COMPLETED LIFE OF
ELIZABETH HALL GLASSNER

CONTEXTUAL STATEMENT

One of the great gifts the church has given to mankind has been the rites of the funeral. Without these rites you and I do not have the possibility to plumb the depths of humanness. For what they do is to tell us just what we already know: that our lives are constantly being accelerated toward death, and death completely surrounds us. And yet we also know that death is an angel of the Mystery and of the dread which comes into our lives.

But we forget, we forget! And so when death comes we are afraid of it, our lives are shocked and torn into a thousand pieces. The rite of the funeral service allows us to be present to the mystery, allows us to name the name, allows us to live life anew. Life becomes fresh and clean again.

No wonder our fathers called this a means of grace. So I call us to enter into the funeral service with the totality of our being, and make transparent what we know so that the mystery is present with us now and at every point of life. Amen.

WITNESS

The church has always understood that death is the most profound experience of life. And by that the church has meant that death and life are not two separate realities, but they are two sides of the same reality. One never knows death save one also knows life. One never knows life save he also knows death. Death has to do with all of one's life. Or you might say the liveliest part of one's living is death, because it comes in the midst of life when you do not expect it. It comes in the midst of life jarring open the future for all mankind. It is that at the bottom of everything that goes on so it is the most profound experience of life. The church has understood that death is therefore that which affects the whole of life and it is that which goes through, not only the family, and immediate relationships but touches every relationship that a given individual might have.

So we begin by understanding what it means for one person to die. It is to know that that person was first of all sent to all humanity. He was first of all sent as a human being to the whole world. In that there are no divisions of male or female. There are no divisions of one kind of culture or another kind of culture, there is just being sent to all of humanity. Therefore death means that one has been taken from all of humanity. Humanity has lost one person and therefore it will never be the same, just as humanity will never be the same because that person showed up having affected the whole of history.

And then that person was also sent to a family into which he was born and within which he grows. There was an effect there that was a shaping that was a giving of life to that family.

Not only did we show up in families we also create families and so that relationship is affected. Just as you are taken from your original family, you also are taken from the family you create. And the relationships of husband and wife and children are affected, created and taken away because that person first came to be and then came not to be.

One is also sent to a city. We are sent to be citizens not just to our birthplaces or simply where we grew up, although that may have stronger roots than any, but finally to the place where we decide to locate ourselves for all of life. For me it is Chicago, for good or for bad, that's my city and I'm her citizen. So when we come to live in a city, that shapes that city and when we die, that city is shaped. And so life and death again feed each other, they shape each other. And that is all that creation is, the coming to be and the coming not to be in that city.

Or the coming to be and the coming not to be is in the church. Certainly we are born into, decide for, and elect our own election within the church. And that is shaped by our coming to be and coming not to be. We are sent to a vocation and a particular occupation. My vocation is to be a minister within the church and therefore I came to be out of that and I will come not to be out of that. The whole vocation of ministry will lose one when I go. It is shaped by that death as much as by that life.

The final thing, that is shaped by history in the life and the death that comes to be and comes not to be, is that of the solitary dimension of life. For the uniqueness of the individual that has done the shaping within the span of the coming to be and coming not to be has also been contributing in the area of the solitary. Without the solitary all of civilization would not be created. For that is the arena out of which we choose and shape the roles of being a family, a community and a city. When death arrives we lose the uniqueness of a particular human being.

When death occurs to any particular person it does not happen to me alone because it was my father or because it involves my son or my daughter, it happens to all of these relationships. Therefore we can stand as that people who celebrate within a community. This is our occasion for acknowledging the coming to be and the coming not to be. For me that is the only way I can begin to grasp anew what it means to be a human. For all the knowing, doing and being that is our lives goes on; the only difference between life and death is that you know and do and be those relationships which I named. But now that death comes there is only one thing to know, that is to know your death and to do your death, and to be the death that is yours.

OBITUARY

I am the Resurrection and the Life, saith the Lord: and he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.

I know that my Redeemer liveth, that he shall stand on the latter days upon the earth: and though this body be destroyed yet shall I see God: whom

I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not as a stranger.

We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

Now let all of the congregation mark the sojourn of Elizabeth Hall Glassner among us. She was sent by God to live in this world and now she has been called from her station. Betty was sent by God to be a part of the family of mankind. She was born April 3, 1927, in Stillwater, Oklahoma, and died April 13, 1972, in Columbia, Missouri. Betty was both a daughter and a sister. She was daughter to Mr. and Mrs. Archie Hall. She was a sister to Mary, John, Albert, Bill, Bob, Carol, and Jerry. All now survive her.

Betty was both a wife and a mother. To Mort she was wife. To Linda, Gayle, Brenda, Carol, David, Michael she was a mother. To Thunder she was a grandmother. Betty was a citizen of Muskogee, Oklahoma. She labored there in her vocation as a social worker and as the president of the Community Action Program Board of Muskogee County. Betty organized the first day care center in the county. She and Mort cared for 53 foster children in Muskogee over a span of seven years. These endeavors of Betty's are not to be extolled above the endeavors of other men for they are one indication of Betty's decision to expend her life on behalf of all men.

As she lived, she anchored herself to the church and now she is gone to claim her place among the congregation of the faithful and the triumphant.

And yet through it all, Betty was a solitary. As a solitary she lived her life in sober joy and now with awesome tranquility she is living her death. Such is the destiny of being a sojourner on this planet. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

