

**The Celebration of Life of Cathy Thuem LeJune
Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church, Houston, Texas
17 January 2026**

John 5: 24-27

As I have reflected about Cathy's life for several weeks, I was reminded of the story of John Todd, a famous poet and clergyman in the nineteenth century. When he was six years old he lost both parents in an accident and was taken in by a kind aunt who raised him until he went to Seminary. A few years later the aunt was gravely ill and in distress she wrote Todd a letter. Would death mean the end of everything, or could she hope for something beyond? Here, condensed from The Autobiography of John Todd, is the letter he sent in reply:

"It is now thirty-five years since I, as a boy of six, was left quite alone in the world. You sent me word you would give me a home and be a kind mother to me. I have never forgotten the day I made the long journey to your house. I can still recall my disappointment when, instead of coming for me yourself, you sent your servant, Caesar, to fetch me. I remember my tears and anxiety as, perched high on your horse and clinging tight to Caesar, I rode off to my new home. Night fell before we finished the journey, and I became lonely and afraid. 'Do you think she'll go to bed before we get there?' I asked Caesar. 'Oh no!' he said reassuringly, 'She'll stay up for you. When we get out o' these here woods, you'll see her candle shinin' in the window.' Presently we did ride out into the clearing, and there, sure enough, was your candle. I remember you were waiting at the door, that you put your arms close about me--a tired and bewildered little boy. You had a fire burning on the hearth, a hot supper waiting on the stove.

After supper you took me to my new room, heard me say my prayers, and then sat beside me till I fell asleep. Someday soon God will send for you, to take you to a new home. Don't fear the summons, the strange journey, or the messenger of death. God can be trusted to do as much for you as you were kind enough to do for me so many years ago. At the end of the road you will find love and a welcome awaiting, and you will be safe in God's care."

That journey home that the young Todd took is a metaphor for life itself. Our journey through life has its peaks and its valleys. There were certainly many peaks in Cathy's life. Her family was perhaps her biggest source of joy. She had a loving husband who was her companion for 40 years, three accomplished children, and a beautiful grandchild. Her career as an educator was another great accomplishment in her life, as was her ministry to this church. She was involved in so many ministries, but over the last few years, she and Mitch masterfully led our *In His*

Steps program. She was always faithful to the task at hand because she knew she was serving the God who loved her and the community that walked alongside her family for decades. To us who knew her, it was pretty obvious that Cathy loved the Lord, loved this church, and most especially, she loved her *In His Steps* team.

I still remember Cathy's call to my wife and I two years ago during the Fall Campaign for I.H.S. "You do so much for others that it is easy to forget you yourself may have specific needs we can pray for. Is there anything that comes to mind?" I remember telling her, "Your call could not have come at a better time." Then, without reservation, I shared with her my fears over a health scare for my wife, stress here at the office with some staff changes, and how sad I felt over the loss of a beloved parishioner. Calmly and lovingly, Cathy listened to me and promised me I would be in her prayers that week. Somehow, sharing my burdens with someone who was willing to listen empathically made my week much better.

Cathy's life also had valleys, as all of our lives have valleys. The last year of her life was painful, and there was a great deal of anxiety and fear. But, regardless of how hard her life was from time to time, she never lost sight of God's providence, of his mercy and his love for her. That level of faith and love for God is an inspiration for me, and I hope it is an inspiration for you as well. There are times when, no matter how hard we look into the distance, we don't seem to see the goal line. There are times when life's conflicts, illnesses, or financial reversals, block our view of our final destination. God seems very far away and we feel truly alone in this world, we feel abandoned by God, whom we see as uncaring. We feel abandoned to our own devices. But, today, Jesus tell his disciples, "Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live."

The time will come when we will see his light on the window, the door open, and we will know that there is refuge waiting for us, there is respite beyond the valley, he who loves us greatly is waiting. He who loves us with amazing passion and unwavering commitment is actually walking towards us with open arms. He is running to meet us and in his loving embrace we will feel at home for ever. In his embrace we will no longer feel any pain or suffering. In his embrace we will not feel the debilitating effects of illness. In his loving embrace we will no longer feel any fear, any resentment, or any regrets.

Today, as we grieve the loss of a friend, we also rejoice that she has finally come out into the clearing and has seen the face of God, whom she sees as a friend and not a stranger. Today, Cathy is in God's own presence, restored, rejuvenated, and filled with joy, health, and life. She has finally arrived at that great home

prepared for her by God since the beginning of time. She is in the company of her beloved parents and friends who preceded her in death. Surrounded by the love of those who came before her. So, in a profound way, this celebration of life is more for us than it is for Cathy. We need to hear that there is hope. We need to be reassured that the light will be on for us when we cross to the other side. We need to know that life's struggles are not in vain, that there is a purpose to our existence, and that there is salvation for those who accept Jesus Christ in their lives.

Today, I am here to tell you that there is hope in the name of Jesus of Nazareth. There is hope in his sacrifice for us. There is hope in his constant invitation to us to come to him, to accept him, to welcome him into our hearts. And I know personally that when you do accept and welcome him, he will radically change your life in ways you can never imagine. He will transform your relationships and will give you the joy your life needs. This is the truth that Cathy's life preaches to us today. Cathy's life is a testament that life is better when you have Jesus in your heart. Life is better when you are connected to the power source, when you know where you are going, and when you know that Jesus himself will come to meet you when you make it to the other side.

Today we say goodbye to a good friend, but our goodbye is not the sad cry of one who has lost the race. Our Goodbye is the cry of triumph of one who has made it victoriously to the finish line. Today we say goodbye to a dear wife, mother, grandmother, teacher, mentor, and church leader. But our goodbye is not the desperate cry for one gone forever. We know that we will see Cathy soon when our own race is done. We know that Cathy will be waiting for us on the other side. Today we say goodbye to a dear Christian, but our goodbye is not the cry of one without hope. Our goodbye is done with joy and with confidence. We know that our salvation has already been purchased. We know that we will see our dear friend again. We are sure of this. In this rests our mutual confidence. Eternity is the promise of our Christian faith. It is the destination place and our inheritance!

May Christ continue to bless us, Amen!