

A Sermon Preached at Maple Street Congregational Church, UCC  
Danvers, MA  
Rev. Kevin M Smith  
January 21, 2018  
Psalm 62:5-12, Mark 1:14-20

### *Values*

What gives you joy? What “floats your boat?” What do you value in your life? What gives you purpose?

When my mother passed away at Christmas time and I was alone with her. She was lying in bed covered by the Maple Street Church prayer shawl. She was mostly asleep. Every now and then as I held her hand and talked to her or read to her from the Bible or sang one of her favorite hymns to her, one of her eyes would open just for a second or two. Mom was already well on her journey back home to God. I would sit there next to her and stroke her head. I would look around her bedroom. Pictures of her Aunt Dorothy and Uncle Clarence who helped raise her. Her father’s wrist watch. Mom’s cedar jewelry box – these important mementos of her life and family surrounded her. Pictures of her family on the walls. Things filled with memories and meaning for my beloved mother. Then, of course, I would see the trappings of caring for her healthiness these last days. The hospital bed from hospice she lay in. The cloths to bath her with. Her medicines that would keep her comfortable.

Visiting my mother and walking around her apartment filled with the furniture of my childhood brought back visceral and vivid memories of the life I had with my family many years ago “in a universe far away” as they say in the movies. Lots of family pictures. Mom’s china in the walnut hutch with glass doors. Dad’s old roll-top desk where he paid the family bills. The things of a life, of a family, of a time long ago. My mother cherished these things, of course. Being surrounded by them I’m sure gave her a feeling of home, of safety, of memories of family.

But in the end, in our end, what she valued most, what floated her boat, what gave her the greatest joy and what gave me the greatest joy was each other. Family. People. Strangers who became our family. Very different people who floated into our lives through friendship, through marriage, through our church. All of the furniture, and material things from the past, all the mementos, paled in value to that beautiful woman who bore me lying in that bed breathing her last breaths. And, now that she is gone, now that

her physical presence—her touch, her voice, her look—is no more, I still have the greatest part of her that will live eternally within me—and that is her loving spirit. The God infused spirit of Dorothy Jean Smith lives on in me, in my sisters and brothers, and in all the people Dorothy touched in this life. The most valuable thing I share with my sisters and brothers is Mom’s spirit of love bonded eternally with God.

After church today we will gather in the social hall to talk about what we value as the people of this church. We will leave this simple but beautiful sanctuary with the pews and the organ and the red carpet, and the altar table and the pulpit and we will proceed downstairs where there is a kitchen filled with things that help us eat, where there is a stage and a curtain, and a cement floor and new comfortable padded folding chairs. And there will be people. You and me. And there will be a cloud of saints of this church that have gone on before us but who ate at those round tables and used that kitchen and read those bulletin boards on the walls. And there will be the spirits of the forty some people who came together in common purpose to begin this church one hundred and seventy-two years ago. People who valued other people enough that they called for the immediate abolition of an evil system of slavery. They had the courage to stand for something because they had faith. People who came together because they sensed a Spirit’s call to engage in good works in this community we and they called home. What did they value? What floated their boats? What gave them joy? Well, after their church buildings burned down not once but twice, it must have been more than just wood, bricks, and mortar.

When we explore together after worship today, stay focused on what we value in this thing we call the “body of Christ.” What is the legacy we have been given and what legacy do we want to leave that is truly meaningful, what will be truly eternal? What really matters? What really gives us joy? What floats our boats in this day and age and time? What shall we “set our hearts on?” What is Jesus, like he did on that beach so long ago, calling us to do? Let us discern together what God values that we should value, too. Amen.

