“Don't let anyone stand up at my service and talk about what a saint I was, because I wasn't.” Billy and I heard that more than once in the months and weeks leading up to Mom's death. So if you have something nice rehearsed or written down, please tuck it away and save it for later at the meal or at our house. Otherwise, I'm afraid Mom will have a way of finding out and I'm the one who will have to answer for it.

We gather this afternoon to celebrate Norah's last earthly going out and her coming into that wondrous place where death and mourning and crying and pain are no more. On this side of that final journey, you and I mourn. That we do is a way of honoring Norah's life and the relationships she had with us. In these last weeks, I have had days when I believe I can't mourn any more and other days when I sense that the mourning has barely started. She was the best mother a daughter could hope for – she was my rock, the one I could turn to in the best and the worst times of my life. She was my cheerleader, my protector and my friend. I know Billy would say she was a great mother-in-law, too. She was a cherished friend and sister in Christ to many, so it is absolutely appropriate to feel sad about her death, about the fact that we can't pick up the phone and call her or tell her about our day or plan the next trip with her or look forward to seeing her when she makes her next visit to Floyd.

The psalmist speaks peace to our deepest sorrows. As we look back at Norah's life, we see all the times in which her help came from the Lord, who made heaven and earth, who never left Norah's side, who never abandons a single one of us. When Norah came into the world to parents who had very little in the way of earthly means, God was there,

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overflowing with joy for this new child of God's heart. When three other children came along, God was there, too, holding up the family as they struggled. Then came World War II and another going out, this time all the way from London to the most western part of England when Norah was seven. Her younger brother and sister went, too, each of them identified by name tags pinned to their coats; each carrying a small bag and a gas mask. Norah and her siblings were gone for almost five years. In this way, they survived the bombings in London, though being separated from their families made them some of the youngest casualties of that horrific time. Then another coming in, back to London, then going out again, leaving home at 16 and joining the Army at 18. A long distance going out followed – Army duty in Egypt. Then a coming in again, home long enough to meet her husband, a handsome American soldier who swept her off her feet. Again, a going out, this time to the United States, all the way to another country's western coast, as the young couple settled in California and built a family with two children. Fifteen years later, another going out, to Virginia, where she worked and cared for her sick husband. Then her husband's death, her time of mourning leading into another move, this time to North Carolina's coast to live and travel and thoroughly enjoy the last 20 years of her life. And then, of course, cancer.

“I lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord....The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.” There was a lot of turbulence over Norah's 84 years, a lot of uncertainty

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and pain in those going outs and those coming ins. The one constant was the Lord who was her keeper, the shade at her right hand, the Lord who kept her life. One of the most exquisite lessons I learned from my mom was that resurrection didn't just happen outside of Jerusalem at a sealed tomb. Because it happened there, resurrection happens every time something in us dies and God brings us back to life, not by our own cleverness or force or will, but by the Lord who once was dead and now lives so that all God's children may leave pain behind and step into the brilliant light of new beginnings. Those are the going outs and the coming ins we all experience this side of the Great Coming In. Matthew Laney writes: “Christianity (and life) is all about crossing over. As people of the cross, this is not only an obvious message but a hopeful one. Because resurrection is on the other side of the cross, we know that the end of one world is only the beginning of another. In many places in your life, you are transitioning and crossing over. Embrace it and trust that Christ, who is the timeless Alpha and Omega, is with you every step of the way.” That is what we celebrate today.

Norah was not a saint in the sense in which she was using the word. I wrote this in the journal I was keeping while I sat by her bed in those last days: “Mom was smart, vivacious, adventurous, funny and fun. She was also headstrong, stubborn, opinionated and right most of the time.” She was, in short, human – beautifully flawed and marvelously loving to that small group she called her family and her friends. I hate to contradict her, but she was, in God's way of looking at us, a saint after all. There was

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nothing in her 84 years that she could do or not do to earn that designation. God did it all and now God calls her and all those we have loved and lost *Saints in Light*. Thanks be to God!

Amen.

*Sermon for the memorial service of Norah A. Mitchell*

*Zion Lutheran Church*

*Floyd, Virginia*

*June 30, 2016*