

The Funeral of Carol Shupp – September 19, 2026
Matthew 5:1-12

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Diedre, Ruth, Robert, family and friends of Carol, sisters and brothers in Christ: grace, mercy, and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ. As I already indicated in my welcome at the beginning of the service, we are here today to do three things, broadly speaking: first, to remember and give thanks for the life of Carol Shupp, and what she has meant to us; second, to mark her passing and grieve her death; and third, to commend her into the care of God, her creator and redeemer.

You have gotten us off to a good start with the first of those tasks in the memories you have just shared, and there will be a chance for anyone else who wants to share stories and memories of Carol during the luncheon that follows the service, to which all are invited. I will add only briefly my own memories of Carol and my deep gratitude for knowing both her and Frank. As I think I mentioned at Frank's funeral, Carol and Frank were among the first to welcome Helen and me into their home when we came to Grace eleven years ago. They also welcomed our daughter Marian and looked after her for three weeks of our first summer while Helen and I were away visiting Marian's brother in the Peace Corps. (Marian, I think, is joining us on the livestream from her home in England.) I also remember singing with Carol in choir when we first came. She was singing tenor by then, so we shared that. But she was very active in many other areas of the congregation's life, including faith circle, serving on the WELCA board, the Mutual Ministry Committee, and for many years as a key member of the Food Pantry board. When I arrived, she was the "numbers person" who kept track of clients served and managed the necessary paperwork for the Eastern Illinois Food Bank.

And that ties us in nicely to the Gospel reading you chose for our service today, the famous Beatitudes from the Gospel according to Matthew. These Beatitudes are often taken as things we ought to do to be good people and gain God's favor, but what they really are in the larger context of Matthew's Gospel is Jesus giving his disciples a surprising change of focus from what could have been just another political or social movement, which is what they were expecting when Jesus started talking about God's kingdom. This is the beginning of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus has taken his disciples up the mountain, away from the crowds who had come to him for help, and he is now telling his inner circle that those people down there who they might regard as losers, the meek, the dispirited, the poor, those seeking justice and peace – those people, says Jesus, are what the kingdom of heaven looks like. However else you might like to label them, I label them blessed by God.

And that's why this Gospel reading is so appropriate for us to hear today. Because it was Carol's faith that aligned her values with the values of Jesus expressed in these Beatitudes, and those values Carol lived out in service to the food pantry here at Grace, in her work with United Way, and also in her personal interactions with others. Carol was not the loudest voice in the room, except maybe in her vocation as mother, but she was always engaged, always curious, and she paid attention to the people she interacted with. And that curiosity and attention extended to national and world events, as you might expect from someone who was so widely travelled. I experienced Carol as someone who was deeply concerned with how our politics in recent years was affecting especially marginalized people, both at home and abroad, not least when it came to the status and welfare of women. I think it would be fair to say that Carol was one of those blessed people who "hungered and thirsted for righteousness."

Carol was also a humble person, and for that reason – and maybe also because she was a pastor's daughter – I think she would want me to shut up about her now and turn our attention instead to the *source* of her compassion, her faith, and her hope, especially as we today mourn her loss. She would want us to trust Jesus' promise that we who mourn are blessed. Mourning comes with the territory of love, companionship, and friendship. We mourn because Carol was such a gift to us. Mourning means that we have been blessed by the one we mourn. And it also means that the compassionate part of us, the part that cares about others, is working, and can continue to be a blessing to others. Mourning hurts, but it would be sadder for us if we didn't hurt today.

And that gets us to our final task, commending Carol into the care of her merciful and loving savior. One of the things that might help us do that now is knowing that Carol commended herself into Jesus' care. She reached out toward the end of her life to have a pastor bring her Holy Communion. When I teach children about that sacrament, I tell them that it's like a hug from your mother. A good mother will tell her children that she loves them, but she'll also give them a hug, even when we're squirrely preteens who don't think we want to be hugged (one of the best things my own mother ever did for me). God is like that, continually calling out to us in the spoken words of the gospel, promising us forgiveness, mercy, and life through his death and resurrection, and reaching out to embrace us in the sacraments, so that we may have confidence to cling in faith to his death-defying, life-giving promises that are for us, but not only for us, but for the world God loves in Jesus.

Blessed are we who mourn. May that blessing take hold of our hearts now to follow in the footsteps Carol walked by the grace of God. And may the peace of God, the peace that Carol now enjoys in its fulness, the peace that passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.