

Homily for Joyce Evangeline Ekegren

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Transfiguration Lutheran Church
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Whenever I preside at a funeral for someone who lived nearly a decade I always marvel at how much they've witnessed in their lifetime. The last one hundred years has seen more dramatic change than any other time in all of history. What an amazing time to have lived.

Joyce Ekegren was born into a world that most of us never knew. She was born in Annandale in 1925 on the family farm with 8 siblings, not including the twins that were lost just before her. At that time Calvin Coolidge was president, the first president ever to have his inaugural address broadcast over the radio. You can imagine families gathered in the living room around this new form of entertainment and listening to events happening thousands of miles away.

Joyce lived through the Great Depression, the Second World War, the expansion of electricity, indoor plumbing, automobiles, television, air travel, even space travel. The world Joyce leaves today is so far different than the world she came into.

And throughout all those years, imagine all the rooms she was in along the way. Could you even begin to count the number of rooms you are in throughout your life?

There is the room you are born in, the room, you slept in, the living room, the dining room, the den, the basement, the bedrooms of your siblings, or perhaps the ones you shared with your siblings, the classrooms, the waiting rooms and doctors' offices. There were Sunday school rooms, and locker rooms, and dance halls, and work rooms. Life is an endless stream of one room after another. How many rooms was Joyce in in her 94 years of living on earth. Could we even begin to count how many?

Joyce grew up on the family farm in Annandale and as the second born she helped a great deal to raise all her sibling and make the family farm go. There were pigs and cows and chickens. One of her jobs was to follow the wild turkeys to gather their eggs. Then there were the men who needed to be fed and cared for as they labored in the fields. The jobs were many and they were endless, particularly during the first fifteen years of her life when she and her family endured the Great Depression and all its challenges.

Joyce graduated Annandale high School in 1942. Her father didn't want her to graduate because he felt it was a waste of time when all she would ever be doing is taking care of the men and the home and the farm. But her mother was strong and insisted she finish school and learn. Her mother instilled in her the power of knowledge—it was something nobody could ever take away.

Graduating while WW II was under way was bittersweet as she felt the sting of loss as many of her friends did not come home from that war.

Joyce attended St. John's Lutheran church where she was baptized, confirmed, and married. After high school she moved to Minneapolis and attended business school, living with her Aunt Gert who was hip and cool because she lived in the big city and they did wild things together, like having their tea leaves read.

She worked as a nanny and an office secretary. One of her special treats every day was buying herself a coke in the afternoon.

She later lived with her younger sister, Elaine, in the Pillsbury and Uptown areas and they would go to dances at the Prom Center and the Marigold. In the summer when it was hot they would take a streetcar downtown to go to the movies to stay cool and get away from the heat.

On a blind date in 1951 she met Bob Ekegren, a business man. It was a match and they were married just months later that year in July at her hometown church in Annandale. Bob was a business man and his work took them to many places, including New Ulm, Beaver Bay, Duluth, and Superior. In Beaver Bay Joyce remembers having to chase brown bears off the roof and away from the laundry drying on the line.

After the birth of their first two children, Diane and Robert in 1957 and 1959, they picked up and moved to Temple City, California, a suburb of Los Angeles. Bob sold real estate and Joyce stayed home to raise her children. It was a socially active time that Joyce remembers fondly. She loved all the flowers and being a part of the Minnesota Society in Los Angeles that even served Lutefisk dinners every year. I would imagine lutefisk would taste different in Los Angeles.

In 1974 they returned to Minnesota and bought a home in Bloomington where they spent their remaining years. They made this church, Transfiguration Lutheran Church, their home as well.

Bob had health issues and needed to be near family. He endured dialysis and shortly after kidney transplant he died. Joyce was devastated and spent years grieving this loss.

As she recovered from her grief, she went back to work. Carol and Arvid Anderson helped her find work at the Can Do Company and Umaga, where she helped with shows and displays. She attended night school during that time to learn accounting that led to a job at a credit union.

Joyce worked until age 70 even though she always missed working and the socializing that went with it, and because she loved taking care of everyone. In her retirement she became a committed grandmother going to great lengths to see that her grandchildren got her extra care.

Learning was her life-long passion. He was always educating herself about everything, including economics and the stock market, medicine, and many other subjects. She always remained informed and educated, a gift her mother gave her.

Her health began to decline eight years ago and she knew it was happening. She began to lose her memory. She became unable to walk. She did not want to slowly decline and she hated it. On one occasion while Cheryl was with her she asked for a cup of coffee late at night. Fearing that it would keep her up, Cheryl tried to talk her out of it. But Joyce insisted saying, "I've been drinking coffee my whole life, I can handle it." After that cup of coffee she had a lucid moment and she told her daughter these words:

"You need to put me in a nursing home and get on with your life. Don't be sad for me. I've had a good life and I'll be fine. We all die. I just want you to be happy."

As her children were going through her things they found a news article that she kept in her bedside table that reflected this same sentiment. It' printed in the bulletin and I hope you will read it.

We gather here today to remember Joyce, to celebrate her life, but also to hear a word of hope. We have those words of hope and promise in our Gospel reading. We live our lives in a long succession of rooms that we move into and out of, one right after another. Joyce's last room in life was not her room in La Center. Her last room is not this church, nor is it the grave where her body will be laid.

The night before Jesus left this world he told us where he was going and why he was going there. You heard me read it. He said, I am going to prepare a place for you. In my father's house are many rooms. I will take you there so that where I am you will be also. Then Jesus says with passion I believe, "Would I have told you this if it was not true?"

There is one last room we will all experience and that last room is the best one of all. Joyce has been raised up. She alive. Jesus took her by the hand and led her to that room prepared for her. We can't even imagine what that means, but one thing is means is that Joyce is now alive and well and she is experiencing wonders beyond human comprehension. She is there and she will be there when each one of you arrive. This is God's word and promise. It's called Good News. Jesus would have not told us this if it was not true.

Lord God, we thank you for Joyce and the long life she lived. We thank you for the care she gave her children and grandchildren. We thank you that she was a friend to all and loved to take care of others. We thank you for her faith, a gift from you that guided her through life and now has rewarded her with the best gift of all, eternal life with all the saints in light. Comfort her family. Give them long life too, and faith, and in the end raise us all up to be with you and all those who've gone before us. Thank you for this most precious gift and promise. In Jesus' name.

Amen