



Thoughts on the Journey...

Suanne Gettings—Pastoral Associate

Helen was a remarkable woman. She was intelligent, well versed, and socially conscious. Her strong convictions and beliefs were reflected in the many ways she served in the community. Helen's quick wit and wonderful sense of humor were among her many virtues. Her passion for life was settled in her smile and her confidence was revealed in her determined gait. It is no surprise that Helen's sudden unexpected death at the young age of forty-seven brought shock to everyone connected to her world.

The visitation room at Helen's funeral was expansive and accommodating. It needed to be because of the hundreds of people who came to pay their respects. The chatter was lively with testimonies of *Helen stories* and the impact she had on their lives. Even though there was sadness at the news of her passing, the mood was upbeat and positive – just the way Helen would have wanted her wake.

However, there was one young woman who stood out in the midst of the light atmosphere like a disconnected still-shot. She stood in the corner close to Helen's casket. Her face was buried in a handkerchief that absorbed the tears of her sorrow. She was avoiding other mourners and her intense weeping seemed to indicate a back-story that belonged to her and Helen alone.

Approaching this young woman to offer comfort, she began to weep all the more. In a long drawn out gasp of grief, she reluctantly made her confession. The young woman was Helen's daughter. She revealed that she hadn't spoken to her mother since the 2016 presidential election. Why? She was angry because her mother voted for Hillary Clinton. Her zeal for her political views took precedence over her love for her mom. It not only fractured her relationship with Helen, it created division within their family. She had no idea that her mother's death was imminent, and did not have the opportunity to make peace with her before she died. The heartache of her loss, was now compounded with regret, guilt, and shame; there was very little anyone could do to console her in misery.

In the gospel of Mark, Jesus and his apostles are in the midst of a very large crowd. There is a lot going on in this scene related to Jesus casting out demons. There are the unbelieving scribes from Jerusalem who attribute Jesus' power over demons to Beelzebul, the prince of demons. There were relatives that did not believe Jesus and thought he was out of his mind. In addition, his mother, sisters, and brothers were waiting and wanting Jesus to come out. *(in Semitic usage, the terms "brother," "sister" are applied not only to children of the same parents, but to nephews, nieces, cousins, half-brothers, and half-sisters).*

Jesus began to address them in parables and makes it clear that it is not Satan who is performing these miracles, but the Holy Spirit. Anyone who blasphemes against the Spirit by attributing these works to Satan will have the mark of an everlasting sin. When Jesus is told that his mother, brothers and sisters are waiting for him, Jesus responds,

**“Who are my mother and [my] brothers?”
And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers.”**

Jesus' comment is not meant to denigrate the significance of family. Instead, he is trying to get us to understand that loyalty and obedience to the word of God takes precedence over everything. The loyalty, love, and service to one another extends not only to our immediate family, but to the wider family of Christian believers.

There are many ways that Satan creates division in our lives and draws us away from unity with Christ and his Kingdom; politics is just one way. The distraction from our call to love is great and as a result, there is a growing schism in families, communities, our country, and the world. It's happening on both ends of the political spectrum whether you lean to the left or you lean to the right. Politics is fleeting, but the residual impact of alienating people or groups because of our strongly held convictions can be long-lasting and divisive. Keeping our focus on following Jesus rather than the next politician to come down the pike, will have a much greater impact on the world. Agree to disagree but continue to love as Jesus taught us to love.