

# Greenfield Hill Congregational Church

1045 Old Academy Road  
Fairfield, CT 06824

Telephone: 203-259-5596



Date: November 6, 2011

Sermon Title: Let Your Heart Break Open

Pastor: Rev. Alida Ward

At every meeting of our senior high youth group, SPF, after the 14 boxes of pizza have been consumed and a dozen large bottles of soda are gone, I sit everyone down on the floor of the Len Morgan Youth Barn, in a big circle, for our evening devotions. Sometimes a prayer, sometimes a reading, sometimes a video. A month ago, on October 6, I turned down the lights, turned on the projector and asked them to watch Steve Jobs as he spoke to the graduating seniors at Stanford University.

He had died just 24 hours earlier, and so the words that he had spoken six years ago took on special poignancy, and powerful meaning. And he said this: "When I was 17, I read a quote that went something like this, "If you live each day as if it was your last, someday you'll most certainly be right."" He paused there, and the camera panned to the faces of the students in the crowd, laughing somewhat uncomfortably, as did my SPFers. Steve Jobs smiled and went on. "That made an impression on me," he said, "and ever since then I've looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself "if today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?"

"Remembering that I'll be dead soon," said Steve Jobs, still smiling, "is the most important tool I've ever encountered to help me make choices in life." At this point, the students in the crowd truly looked distinctly uncomfortable. But he pressed on, speaking with increasing urgency and passion. "No one wants to die," he said. "Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share. Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."

Death, Steve Jobs was saying, has a way of making us focus intently on life. Or, at least, it can. It should.

In just a few minutes, we will share a meal from one table. It is the simplest of meals, remembering a table in an upstairs room where Jesus gathered with his friends for supper. When we share that meal in just a few minutes, I will speak the words Christ spoke at that last Supper – *my body, broken for you, my blood, shed for you*. But there was so much more that he said to them that night. There was an urgency, a passion, to all that he said to his friends that night because he knew what they did not know – that his life with them was ending. Even for Jesus himself, death had a way of making him focus intently on life. But it was the *life that he wanted his friends to live* in his absence.

*Listen to me, he said, listen to me: I am only with you a little longer. Listen. I'm giving you a new commandment. Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. And he said it again, even more urgently. Love one another as I have loved you.*

It was his commencement speech, you could say, his last chance to tell his friends what he wanted desperately for them to know: that there is a purpose to our lives, and that purpose, the only purpose, is to love. *Love one another as I have loved you*. Do this remembering me, he said, love one another.

On this Remembrance Day, we have named the names of those who were cherished by this church whose lives are now lived in the presence of God, in a place of welcome that we can only imagine, but that they now know. And it is hard, always, this day, it is hard, for whether the name of one you loved has been named or not, each one of us carries with us names of those who have left for that shared destination before us, and we are here, and it is hard.

What then are we to do? Love one another. Love one another.

The author Kate Braestrup preached from this pulpit two weeks ago, preached a heartbreaking sermon of loss but ultimately of love, God's love. And love is what she spoke about in a book she wrote a couple years ago, as she remembered the hurt of losing her father: *What are those of us still here on earth to do in the face of loss?*, she wrote. *Jesus told us. ... Love others – lots of others – just as he loved us. ... Love more. Start with your siblings, or your spouse, or your parents, but don't stop there. Love whoever needs what you have, love the ones who have been placed in your path... If your heart breaks, let it break open. Love more.<sup>i</sup>*

On this Remembrance Day, on this day of remembering all saints, our saints, this is the way we honor the ones we loved: By loving *more*.

I want to close by offering you a glimpse of one of the lives we have remembered today. Marjorie Howe Scott Doty left this life, and this church family, last December, just a few short months after her beloved husband, Leete. The Dotys lived for many years in the house right behind this church, where they raised three daughters, Carol, Sally and Marilyn.

And when Marjorie died, the three women wrote the eulogy for her service together. *Our mother, they began, embodied the Christian message of love. She loved us, loved our father, loved our family, loved her friends and loved her church. Her generous heart passed that love to all of us. We grew up with that love surrounding us every day. Our childhood was peaceful, safe and loving because of her gentle manner. We never heard an angry word, or heard her say "you should have."*

*She instilled love in us, they said, by loving.*

She instilled love in us by loving.

Marjorie, and each person we have named, and each person we have lost, are not far from us now, not far from us at all. The love that Marjorie's daughters felt surrounding them each day now surrounds their mother, now surrounds each one we cherish, and that same Love surrounds us too.

What we do to honor them, is simply to love. To love more each day. To love as we have been loved, for we are, each one of us, loved.

If the question of today is simply *how then shall we live?* ... then the answer of today is quite simply *by Loving*. We shall live by loving.

Amen.

---

<sup>i</sup> from *Marriage and Other Acts of Charity, (c) 2010, Kate Braestrup*