

Charlotte Chesnutt In Memoriam

The most ancient origins of the word “obituary” have to do with a going to meet—a movement toward an encounter. If you hold up Janie’s gorgeous obituary for Charlotte alongside 15 months of Caring Bridge updates, you see a breathtaking testimony to someone moving toward a glad meeting, and it is very clear that Charlotte and the whole family have known, deep in their hearts and in their bones, whom she was going to meet.

The deepest origins of the word “eulogy” have to do with speaking words that are good and true, and with Charlotte, that’s easy to do.

But on the other hand, how do you begin to do justice to the memory of someone who means so much, and has meant so much, in so many intricate, specific ways, to so many people?

Charlotte never asked me to rank her against anybody else; it wasn’t a competition for who was going to be called the best. Quite the opposite: all you had to do was mention the name of anybody she knew, and she would start launching detailed superlatives about how wonderful they are and how she wished she could be that good.

But there are so many superlatives that can rightly be attached to Charlotte.

How do you do justice to the memory of someone whose life has been such a specific gift to so many?

Her long and amazing life is not all about her death. Far from it.

At the moment, though, when we look back on it from the perspective of these past 15 months, many people have noticed, with profound appreciation and admiration, that Charlotte taught us how *to live even in*

dying. Bob Martin is one who mentioned that to me not long before Charlotte's passing, and I want to flesh that out a little bit.

One of the ways she did that was that she filled this last year with *intentional awareness* of her whole life. She picked it up, looked at it, held it up to the light, reconsidered things, contemplated things, made peace with things. But she examined it closely and asked for help when she felt like she needed it.

Another was that she filled these last 15 months with expressions of love for the people around her.

You who have grown up with her, her family, have shared the miracle and helped to carry the sometimes burdensome weight—as it is for us all—of history, home, and memory; and you have been a source of strength in the present, for whom there could be no substitute.

Calvin, the love story between you and Charlotte has been a precious jewel that has dazzled everyone who has seen it. As you make your way to Iowa, this community celebrates these precious years that we have had you in our midst, and it will take all of us some significant mourning as we cope with not being able to see you every day. Your life is a powerful witness to all of us who mean to live good and faithful lives, and on behalf of all ministers of Word and Sacrament, I still hope someday to come anywhere near the benchmarks you have set for embodying our belief in God's love and justice for all people.

All of you who share with Charlotte the precious gift of family have shown us things about love and loyalty and patience and joy and faith—things that could never be taught by words.

Janie, when I think of Charlotte I think of a whole person with a whole life, but I will always specifically hear you lovingly speaking to “Mamacita” while you adjusted pillows, updated CaringBridge, dealt with questions from a magnificent staff of caregivers at Givens Highland

Farms, hosted visitors, got Charlotte to the exercise class that was so important to her, and made sure that up until the very end she could worship within the church that she loved so greatly and that was so enriched and inspired by her presence.

You who have been her friends—from Montreat ties that go way back, from school days, from pastorates of which she was a crucial part, from her extremely effective professional capacity, from coming to know her in this community in recent years—

Charlotte made it obvious how she held sacred the living memory of how you walked the mysterious journey together, from being friends perhaps decades ago to your faithful care now: calling, writing, visiting, sitting with her, encouraging her, feeding her, arranging her pillow, reading the Bible with her, comforting her, praying with her.

All of that history and all of what made her who she was: one of the ways that even in her dying she taught us how to live was the *intentional awareness* of her whole life; another was the *constant expressions of love* for the people in her life.

And a third way was that she filled this last stage of her life—they gave her three months; she said ‘I’ll see your three months and raise you a year’—with a constant reassessment and reaffirmation of her relationship with Jesus Christ.

I had the high, holy privilege of bringing her her last communion—four or five times, I think.

By the way, she wanted real wine for her communion. And she got it.

It was of urgent importance to her to know—and to do whatever it took on her part—for her Savior Jesus Christ to forgive what she regarded as her sins, and for her Creator to accept and embrace her.

She ached for assurances that God loved her, and this was coming from someone who knew very well, and taught generations, that God loves us all deeply.

The depth of her love of God, the intensity with which she loved her savior Jesus Christ, *and the searching intelligence with which she pursued that love* were electrifying for the people fortunate enough to witness it.

What she felt for her God, her children, her husband, her siblings, her grandchildren, her whole extended family, her friends, her church, the people who helped her—I daresay Charlotte knew love better than us all.

She experienced love in gratitude. She was deeply, spiritually thankful for every single thing she got from family and friends, from caregivers, from church members current and previous, from exercise class, from God.

She experienced love as dependence. None of us is very good at that. Depending on others did not come easily or comfortably to her, but at least to my eyes, she seemed to grow into it. And you—Janie, family, dear friends—you helped her make that transition by loving, and insisting, and being constant in your affection and dedication to her.

She experienced love as a longing of the soul.

She experienced God's love as hope, never finally giving in to despair but always open for the possibility that God may have one more miracle in store for her.

She experienced love as expressible only in the finest beauty. To the end, she had George Beverly Shea singing to her from the music player at her bedside.

She and I experienced love together as laughter, and it gives me some pause to reflect on the fact that not a single thing that I can remember us laughing about is something I would consider appropriate for sharing from the pulpit.

If all these things, and more, were how she loved and experienced love, then to love, for her, was to live.

Maybe if we can live and love the way Charlotte June Frist Faucette Chesnutt did, we can in some way keep holding onto her, even as now, finally, we have come to let her go in peace to the great encounter to which she dedicated every day of her living.

And so I have one more scripture reading, for Charlotte and, more specifically, for those of us she leaves behind.

Philippians 4:4-14

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone.

The Lord is near.

⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything
by prayer and supplication
with thanksgiving
let your requests be made known to God.

⁷And the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds
in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, beloved,
whatever is true, whatever is honorable,
whatever is just, whatever is pure,

whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable,
if there is any excellence
and if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.

⁹Keep on doing the things
that you have learned and received
and heard and seen in me,

and the God of peace will be with you.

Keith Grogg
Anderson Auditorium
Montreat, NC
January 6, 2018