Dear friends,

For many of us, time stopped last week. When we heard the news of Marilyn Hedgpeth's death, we were shocked. It couldn't be. She was so full of vitality. She was so full of love and laughter, grace and poetry, wisdom and compassion. She was so full of life.

Not everyone at FPC knew her, as she retired at the end of 2019 after serving the church as associate pastor for 16 years (for almost three of those years, when the church was without a pastor/head of staff, she served as acting head of staff and brought a steady, anxious-free presence to an uncertain time). Those who did know her, knew her well, for she gave freely of herself. She served at different times as preacher, teacher, confirmation leader, worship liturgist, bellringer, creative visionary, compassionate caregiver, interfaith bridge to neighbors in Durham, wise counselor to those in trouble, Camp New Hope Church School source of energy, Christmas potluck song leader, and friend to many. The light of Christ shone brightly in her life.

How shocking to think that this bright light is gone before any of us could have imagined. Her life, however, will live on in those she encountered along the way, for she left some of herself wherever she went. She left her mark on me in many ways. I am a better person because she was in my life. I know I am not alone in feeling this.

I was particularly affected by her prayers, which were poems directed to God. Though I do not have access to most of them right now, I did find one I want to share with you. It was written in her first year at FPC. She wrote this prayer the week that planet Mars came very close to Earth in 2003. It will not be that close again until 2287. Marilyn, as usual, absorbed the awe of this experience with all of her being and somehow put it into words. That Sunday, she invited the congregation to share in that awe with her as she prayed to the One who created the planets and created us all, asking "How close are you, creating God?" and answering with confident assurance, "We are in you, not close to you, not next to you./We abide in you…that close!"

And now she is as close to God as we could ever hope to be, wrapped in God's arms of grace and peace, face to face with the one who created her and who loves her beyond her imagining, face to face with the source of all light and love and hope. "May all who seek you find your face, and find true peace."

I leave you this week with that prayer and hope that, whether you knew Marilyn or not, you will see how she pointed to God, rested in God, and hoped in God. Her life was a gift. Thanks be to God for Marilyn Hedgpeth.

With love,
Mindy

Prayers of the People
August 31, 2003

Creating God,
Mars of your creation, one of your other planets,
Has wandered very close this week,
The closest that it has been in 60,000 years, only 35 million miles away.
How close are you, creating God?

Millions stood outside Wednesday night, craning their necks in awe, at Mars,
Gawking through telescopes, binoculars, and with the naked eye,
Looking for something extraordinary…
Some say they saw a smiley face there;
Others the face of a mysterious man,
Still others claimed it to be an evil portent,
That the god of war should draw so near.
How close are you, creating God?
What does your face look like,
And what do you portend?

You are as close as the ground beneath our feet.
You are as close as the air that fills the space between –
Us and Mars, between us and the person next to us, between us and us.
We are in you, not close to you, not next to you.
We abide in you…that close!
And we have seen your face before,
Without telescopes or binoculars.
We saw your face once in the person of Jesus.
Neither a happy-go-lucky smiley face, nor a mysterious face,
But a flesh and blood person like ourselves,
Who loved, and suffered, and died, and was reborn.
And now we see his face everywhere,
If we abide in him, as we abide in you, and he abides in us.

What do you portend, creating God?
Do you portend war,
as it seems from Iraq, and Korea, the Middle East, and here?
Or are you still beating swords into plowshares,
And working out a tough peace and shalom
For all the abiders in your star-studded Kingdom?

Lord, we thank you for being near to all those who have looked to you,
Or have called out to you this week……
…May all who seek you, find your face, and find true peace.
And now, together we pray the prayer which you taught us to pray:
Our Father, who art in heaven….