

AColyte

Easter 2014

A Journal of Faith, Doubt, and Other Things
at Austin College



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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN...

The Day After the First Sunday after the First Full Moon after the Vernal Equinox,
Or, San Jacinto Day,
Or, the day before Earth Day,
Depending on How You Choose to Measure Time

*In those days we were single - we lived them one by one
Now we hardly see 'em - they don't walk, they run
But I've got plenty left I've set my sight on
Don't wait up, leave the light on I'll be home soon.
--Chris Smither*

*Some folks live in the black and white
Folks like us survive in the gray
There's a voice out in the distance
That says we're gonna be okay*

*So keep that cross around your neck
And remember what we say
All good things come with the light of day
--Bleu Edmonson*

Look at that picture above.

In many ways, it's a lot like the pictures from ACTivators events that we have hanging on the wall in the Wynne Chapel Conference Room. It's a bunch of 18 to 22 year olds (along with a couple of older adults) at a Presbyterian church camp.

It was taken at a Presbyterian youth gathering.

In 1936.

The older lady standing on the right side of the picture is **Sallie Majors** – the same Sallie Majors for whom the Austin College Religious Life Internship Program is named.

The young man standing to her immediate right, in the dark tie, is **Ellis Nelson**. The photo was taken the summer before his senior year at Austin College.

The guy in the front row sitting between the two girls is **John D. Moseley**. Seventeen years after this photo was taken, he would become the 12th President of Austin College.

And the woman in the polka dot dress is **Sara Bernice Honea**. That was the summer of her 19th birthday. Earlier, Sallie Majors had introduced her to John D. Moseley and, some time after the photo was taken, they got married in Austin. Mrs. Majors planned the wedding.

Dr. Moseley became President of Austin College on September 1, 1953.

As the President's wife, Sara Bernice attended the Austin College Commencement in 1954. That was the first of **sixty consecutive Austin College Commencements** that she witnessed.

Sallie Kennedy McLane Majors was a leader in Presbyterian Christian Education at the congregational, regional, and national level. She was the first Presbyterian in Texas to organize youth ministry conferences and activities that involved multiple congregations. She was also the great aunt of former Austin College Board Chair **Bob Johnson**. Mrs. Majors died in 1975.

John D. Moseley was a hugely influential President at Austin College and a national leader in the area of private and church-related higher education. He died in 2009. About a year ago, Sara Bernice told me that she still dreamed about John D. every night.

Ellis Nelson was a major scholar in the area of Presbyterian Christian Education who served as President of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Later, he was Interim President of Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary when I began studies there in 1987. That all sounds pretty dry, but Ellis was an impish, funny, irreverent, and very smart guy. He and his wife Nancy were close friends of the Moseleys.

Sara Bernice Moseley died on July 18, 2013. Her death was a major and profound event in the life of Austin College, in the lives of the countless people she touched through

Austin College and the Presbyterian Church, and for my family and me. (I've attached four sermons from the two memorial services for her that took place in Sherman last year. If you want to learn more about Mrs. Moseley, that would be a good place to start).

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When I look at that photo and think about Sara Bernice, and Mrs. Majors (whom I never knew personally but have learned much about), and Ellis Nelson (with whom I interacted fairly regularly after 1987), and John D. Moseley (who was my next door neighbor for nearly 15 years), I am reminded of a poem by Henry Van Dyke:

*I am standing upon the seashore.
A ship at my side spreads her white sails
to the morning breeze and starts for the blue ocean.
She is an object of beauty and strength.
I stand and watch her until at length
she hangs like a speck of white cloud
just where the sea and sky come to mingle with each other.
Then someone at my side says; "There, she is gone!"
"Gone where?"
Gone from my sight. That is all.
Her diminished size is in me, not in her.
And just at the moment when someone
at my side says, "There, she is gone!"
There are other eyes watching her coming,
and other voices ready to take up the glad shout;
"Here she comes!"
And that is dying.*

Yesterday was Easter.

Easter is why we Christians think our stories don't end when biological processes cease.

Easter is why I believe Ellis Nelson and Sallie Majors and certainly John D. Moseley were saying "Here she comes!" last July.

Easter is why we miss Sara Bernice Moseley, but we don't despair.

Easter is why we believe that even though death is real, it's not the last word.

Easter is why we're confident that 78 years from now someone will look at a picture of us, smile, and tell some stories that end with semicolons; not periods.

Easter is why we sing at funerals.

Until next time, I remain,
Just Another Cowboy Preacher,
Missing departed friends,
But still singing,

JOHN WILLIAMS
Chaplain

Sara Bernice Moseley Memorial Service

Scripture Readings, Reflections, and Prayers

Covenant Presbyterian Church,
Sherman, Texas
July 26, 2013

Let us, then, learn that we can never be lonely or forsaken in this life. Shall they forget us because they are "made perfect"? Shall they love us the less because they now have the power to love us more? If we forget them not, shall they not remember us with God? No trial, then, can isolate us, no sorrow can cut us off from the Communion of Saints. Kneel down, and you are with them; lift up your eyes, and the heavenly world, high above all perturbation, hangs serenely overhead; only a thin veil, it may be, floats between. All whom we loved, and all who loved us, whom we still love no less, while they love us yet more, are ever near, because ever in His presence in whom we live and dwell.

--Cardinal Henry Edward Manning (1808-1892)

OLD TESTAMENT READINGS AND REFLECTION

Dr. Marjorie Hass

President, Austin College

Job 19:23-27

"O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever!

For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. My heart faints within me!

Isaiah 40:28-31

*Have you not known? Have you not heard?
The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.
He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.
Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;
but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be
weary, they shall walk and not faint.*

Isaiah 65:17-19, 24-25

*... I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.
But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.*

*Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.
The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the
ox; but the serpent—its food shall be dust!
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.*

It is an honor to read words of Torah (Hebrew Scripture) in memory of Sara Bernice Moseley. The passages her family chose – and that were among her favorites – remind me of her: they are beautiful but humble, they are fiercely intelligent, and they are joyful without being naïve.

The reading from *Isaiah* catalogues the blessings that G-d will bestow on us in the world to come. A few lines earlier, in verse 65:20, we read that among these blessings, “He who dies at a hundred years shall be reckoned a youth.” Sara Bernice received this blessing of youthfulness in her old age in *this* world, and it was a blessing she shared with all who knew her.

I met her when she was in her nineties and thought of her as a dear friend. She retained the enthusiasm, energy, and spirit of youth. She knew how to enjoy her days and she brightened every room she entered. Young people, and some of you not so young people, were eager to sit next to her at

parties. I often had to guard the place cards against unauthorized switching (you know who you are)... She could charm the College's VIP guests, say the perfect word of encouragement to a nervous freshman, and elevate ordinary conversation with her funny stories.

The only time I ever saw her weep was one afternoon when we were speaking of how fortunate we both were to have supportive husbands and long, happy marriages. She talked about how much she missed John D and confided that she often talked out loud to him. She said he only rarely answered back.

I know that John will speak about Sara Bernice more personally, and Neil will talk about the impact she made on this congregation and on the Church. I want to say some things about what Sara Bernice means to Austin College.

The job of first lady (or gentleman) is not an easy one – as Anna Laura and Larry can tell you, it isn't even a real job – just a set of unspoken, and sometimes whispered, expectations and duties. And for sixty years, first, as the wife of the president, then as the partner of the president emeritus, and finally as the widowed grand dame of Grand Avenue, Sara Bernice served as the College's ambassador, its memory, and symbol of its values. Her warmth, graciousness, and visible enthusiasm for all things Austin College has made a deep and enduring impact.

She willingly lent her name and her stellar reputation to our projects. The Sara Bernice Moseley Scholarship program has helped hundreds of young people access an Austin College education. Most recently, she allowed us to rename our planned giving society in honor of her and John D. And this is all in addition to her personal philanthropy, which supported more than thirty-five different Austin College projects. Behind her sweet smile was a generous heart and a savvy mind that knew exactly what her involvement could achieve for the College and its students.

She advised four presidents. I know Oscar joins me in appreciation for her sense of the College's history and her kindly offered, gentle advice. When I joined the College, her enthusiastic response to my hiring was to say, "A Jewish woman, how Presbyterian of us," and then she befriended me and made sure that our community knew I had her full support. This was an incredible kindness to me personally and to our family. But making sure I got

off on a good footing and built close relationships within the College and the Church was yet another one of her many gifts to Austin College.

It is hard to imagine marking the College's important events without Sara Bernice among us. I will miss seeing her. Her absence will be felt by all of us. She was a great lady. I am glad I knew her and I am a better person and a better college president for having had her as a model of grace and wisdom.

Sara Caroline, John, Rebecca, and your families – thank you for sharing your mother with Austin College. It can't always have been easy to have grown up in the College's shadow and in the fishbowl that is the president's house. And although Sara Bernice loved to regale me and my children with stories of the many naughty things you three did when you were growing up, I am sure that there were pressures and sacrifices that each of you faced so that your mom could serve the College and the Church. We join you in your grief and in your desire to remember her.

May her memory be for a blessing and may G-d bring comfort to all who mourn. Amen.

GOSPEL READINGS AND REFLECTION

Dr. John Williams

Chaplain and Director of Church Relations, Austin College

John 1:1-5, 14, 16-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.

The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Luke 10: 38-42

Now as they went on their way, [Jesus] entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

I think there are some very good reasons to include the story of Jesus' visit to Mary and Martha in a service where we remember and celebrate and thank God for the grand life of Sara Bernice Moseley, or "Moseley" as she was affectionately known at our house.

(One day, when our daughter Emily was two years old, Sara Bernice was on our front porch talking to Linnea. Impatient to get into the conversation, Emily blurted out, "Hey Moseley, stop talking!" That delighted Sara Bernice and, from that day forward, she has always been "Moseley" to us.)

This passage from Luke gives us some good language to remember and celebrate Moseley's life. But we have to be careful when we look at this story. There are two things in here that are not like Moseley at all.

Martha's pretty whiny in verse 40 when she says to Jesus:

"Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me."

I've known Sara Bernice for over 30 years. I've lived next door to her for twenty years. And we've talked about all kinds of things. In all kinds of circumstances.

And, in all those years, I never—*ever*—heard her grumble. Or complain. Or whine.

This passage gives us good tools to think about what Moseley means to us. But Martha's whininess is not part of that.

Neither is the distinction suggested throughout this text between seriousness and hospitality—between graciousness and devotion—that is usually part of what we think of when we hear this story.

Jesus himself suggests that distinction when he tells Martha:

"Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

That seems to suggest a difference between being a good, attentive host and being a good, devoted disciple.

But all of us who knew Sara Bernice knew that she—as much as anyone we will ever know—was always both.

Her graciousness is legendary.

I first met her in Hartford, Connecticut in 1982 at the General Assembly of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America—the old “Northern” Presbyterian Church.

I was a Youth Advisory Delegate to that meeting and Moseley was there as an ecumenical delegate representing the old “Southern” Presbyterian Church.

It was the summer between my sophomore and junior years at Austin College. Moseley found out that there was an AC student at the meeting in Hartford and she invited me to go to dinner with her.

So we set up a date.

On the night we were to meet, I was delayed in another meeting and couldn't get to the restaurant until more than an hour after the time we had arranged.

Those were the days before cell phones, and I couldn't contact her. I was afraid she would think that I stood her up.

When I got to the restaurant, she was right where she told me she'd be. She greeted me warmly and we had a wonderful dinner in which she gave me the impression that the high point of her whole trip was getting to meet me. The fact of my tardiness never came up. (Although—in the last twenty years—if she was in the room, I could never get this far telling this story without *her* pointing out that I was late).

That was my first encounter with Sara Bernice.

I'm sure this room is full of people who recognize the woman in that story. Many of you can tell similar stories about her warmth and grace and genuine attentiveness.

In 2008, our family inherited a dog from Linnea's father. Molly moved into our back yard and one day she pried loose a board in the fence between Moseley's yard and ours. Soon, Molly and our other dog—Lucy—were making regular visits to Moseley's back yard and, eventually, her back door.

And it wasn't long before they started getting treats through that door.

When the Moseley children decided that the fence needed to be replaced, Sara Bernice said that would be fine—as long as the new fence included a hole for the dogs. Her graciousness was not even limited to one species.

We could fill the rest of this day with stories about her hospitality and graciousness;

- about her insisting that Christmas carolers come in for cookies and hot chocolate;
- about her sending personal notes to every single Sara Bernice Moseley Scholar at Austin College;

- about her going over old annuals so she would recognize Austin College alums as they returned to campus for their 50th class reunion.

Sara Bernice was every bit as gracious and genuinely concerned about others as Martha is in today's story from Luke. And she did it all without whining.

And she was also every bit as devoted as Mary.

She wasn't devoted in a somber, pompous, condescending way. But she worked very hard to take the right things seriously and to act in a way that was consistent with her commitments and values.

All the way through last Spring, Sara Bernice—with her faithful sidekick Marian McCarley—attended most of the cultural, academic, and religious events on the Austin College campus.

She did that because she was devoted

- to culture.
- And to the life of the mind.
- And to the life of faith.
- And to Austin College.
- And especially to Austin College students.

I received a message this week from The Rev. Sarah Allen—a former Sara Bernice Moseley Scholar at Austin College.

In her message, Sarah spoke of

remembering how generous [Moseley] was with her time and her love—

and then she said,

I have this memory etched [in my mind] of her greeting kids at Covenant Vacation Bible School one summer dressed head to tails in safari gear.

Again, none of us who knew her are surprised by that at all.

Sara Bernice did that because she was devoted

- to children.
- And to the Bible.
- And to the Church.

And she had that same unflinching devotion

- to John D.;
- to Sara Caroline, John, and Rebecca;
- to her grandkids and great grandkids (who she always referred to collectively as “the greats”);
- and to all the other friends and communities (and dogs) who she cherished as much as they cherished her.

Like Mary who “sat at the Lord’s feet and listened,” Sara Bernice was devoted to the things that mattered most to her. Throughout her life, she worked hard to avoid unnecessary distractions and to take the right things seriously.

And there’s one more somewhat less obvious element in this story that is appropriate for us to consider today.

Recently, several scholars have pointed out that for Mary to be at Jesus’ feet—listening to what he was saying—would have been scandalous to a first century audience.

The cultural assumption at that time and in that place would have been that Mary—like Martha and any other women who were there—should have been in the kitchen with the women, not among the men who were talking about serious and important things.

When Jesus tells Martha

Mary has chosen the better part

he’s implicitly challenging a culture that presumed that there are some important things that women cannot and should not do.

Sara Bernice never got that message.

Actually—growing up in Texas in the first half of the 20th century—she probably got that message a lot.

She just ignored it.

In a condolence message Austin College Alumna and former Columbia Seminary President Laura Mendenhall said

[Sara Bernice] gave me a model for women in leadership that I have tried to emulate and will continue to try to emulate.

Rev. Sallie Sampsell Watson, Missional Presbyterian and Stated Clerk of Santa Fe Presbytery, said

*[Sara Bernice] was one of my heroes,
and now she will be part of my canon of saints.
A true legend."*

Former Moseley Scholar Courtney Mullins said Sara Bernice was

Definitely one of the women I look up to in my life.

Those are three women who graduated from Austin College in three different decades. They all remain active in the Presbyterian Church. And they all point to Sara Bernice's particular example for committed women in leadership—both within and beyond the Church—as hugely influential in their lives.

Moseley never spoke to me about the difficulties she faced as she became the first woman ever ordained to the office of Ruling Elder by this congregation; or as she became the first woman ever nominated—and later the first woman ever elected—as Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States—but we know there were difficulties to face.

Without ever losing the graciousness and devotion that we've been discussing, Sara Bernice was fearless as she faced the real obstacles that stood in her way as she rose to positions of service and prominence and leadership in a changing church and a changing world.

Like Marjorie and Neill—and most of the rest of us in this room—I could go on for hours about Moseley’s graciousness, devotion, and fearlessness. But I’ll close with this:

Sara Bernice used the adjective “grand” in normal conversation more than anyone else I have ever known.

She talked about “grand days,” “grand circumstances,” “grand holidays,” “grand performances,” “grand friends,” and “grand surprises.”

As we gather today to remember and give thanks to God for the grand life and grand legacy of this grand woman, I want to suggest that the best way for us to honor Sara Bernice is to strive—in our individual lives and in our life together—to follow her example;

- to be as grand as we can;
- to live fearlessly (and without complaint) in the face of obstacles;
- to devote ourselves to the people and communities that matter most to us; and
- to live each day with unfailing graciousness.

She was an amazing gift and blessing to us all.

She will be missed.

She will be remembered.
She should be celebrated.

She should be emulated.

Thanks be to God for Sara Bernice Moseley.

NEW TESTAMENT READINGS AND REFLECTION

Rev. Neill Morgan

Pastor, Covenant Presbyterian Church

Ephesians 4: 1-6

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Romans 8:28-39

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.*

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written,*

*'For your sake we are being killed all day long;
we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'*

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Revelation 21: 1-7

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,*

'See, the home of God is among mortals.
He will dwell* with them;
they will be his peoples,*
and God himself will be with them;
he will wipe every tear from their eyes.
Death will be no more;
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'*

And the one who was seated on the throne said, 'See, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true.' Then he said to me, 'It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give water as a gift from the spring of the water of life. Those who conquer will inherit these things, and I will be their God and they will be my children.'

"Tie These Dreams"

The words of the revelation sound like a dream:

God coming down from heaven,
living among mortals,
all of creation renewed,
death will be no more,
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
for the first things have passed away.'

All too often, the church has treated the Revelation as a dream, a vision of a world far removed from our own, a mystical different dimension that exists on the other side of some catastrophic divine intervention that is yet to come. What happens, however, when we take seriously the eschatology of John of Patmos? What happens when we take him at his word that God is at work renewing the world, bringing down heaven to earth? That God has called us, as beloved children, to inherit a world renewed, reconciled, redeemed in that peace with justice the prophets call Shalom?

What happens, I think, is a life like that of Sara Bernice Moseley--whose presence would not let us settle for a world of division and despair; a

presence that would not let us keep our eyes cast down on a broken and violent world without becoming part of God's work to heal and renew.

Over the last seventeen years, I have been privileged to have a front row seat as I watched the effect that Sara Bernice had on others.

I watched as Austin College students who had grown up in the Presbyterian Church, hearing the name of the first woman moderator of the PCUS, received their first chance to meet her face to face. Especially the young women who saw her as a role model, once they attended an event, a tea or a luncheon or reception where Sara Bernice spoke to the gathering of young scholars, or sat next to one of them and demonstrated the graciousness for which she was famous, delighting in their stories, finding connections with their home church or their family members, those young students came out of the meeting star-struck.

Over the years I heard many of them reach in vain for the words to describe the awe they had just experienced in the presence of this legendary Presbyterian leader. The teenagers would make analogies to the biggest stars they could think of: It was like meeting the Presbyterian Taylor Swift or Anne Hathaway, and finding out she's not just beautiful, she's the most gracious person you ever met.

And then, a few years ago, one freshman young woman said, "It was like having a private audience with the Presbyterian Albus Dumbledore."

I struggled for words to describe how it felt, in 1996, when I had been hoping and praying for a call from the search committee in Sherman, Texas. I knew they were down to three candidates and the next time I heard from them, they would either extend a call or let me know I was no longer a candidate. The telephone rang. I looked at the caller I.D., a brand new technology at the time, and saw the name John D. Moseley, and knew that Sara Bernice was on the other end of the line. As the phone rang, I thought, either they asked Sara Bernice to call me because they wanted the most gracious person in the world to let me down easy, or they wanted to extend the call and they knew there is no way I would tell Sara Bernice Moseley "No."

As I struggled for words to describe how that felt, John Williams told me: "That caller I.D. became for you a burning bush."

A few years later, when we planned our congregation's sesquicentennial, our committee wanted Rodger Nishioka to be our guest preacher.

--His schedule is so busy, how could we possibly get him to come?

--Neill, you know him, do you think you could call him and get him to come?

--No, I don't think he would come just because I asked him; but I know someone else who could ask him.

The next afternoon, my phone rang. Rodger said, "Neill. Neill Morgan. You devious man! I see right through you!"

Our plan worked. If you're an elder (ruling or teaching) or an educator in the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A., you just don't say "No" to Sara Bernice Moseley. Someone who has lived with a vision of God's renewing work drawing her into the future; and giving us a glimpse of that vision of God's new heaven and new earth: Is there anything any more compelling?

Letters of condolence and appreciation have poured in to Sara Bernice's children, to John and Marjorie for Austin College, and to me as her pastor. I want to read one from the present moderator of the General Assembly, Neal Presa:

July 23, 2013

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! As you gather for the memorial service of Sara Bernice Moseley, I offer the heartfelt love and prayers to you and the Moseley family on behalf of your sisters and brothers throughout the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).

I had the good pleasure and great delight of meeting Sara earlier this year during an official moderatorial visit to Austin College, at the home of College president Marjorie Hass. She was warm, a true southern gentlelady, hospitable, and generous in her welcome and support. Her first question to me was, "How's the Church?" We engaged in conversation about her prayer for unity in the Church, as we also shared stories about the rigors of serving as General Assembly moderator. We in the PC(USA) give thanks to God for her tireless and faithful service and Gospel witness in the Church, at Austin College, in the community, and in numerous

places and countless ways she has touched lives. She is a distinguished predecessor of mine, having been elected as the first woman to serve as General Assembly moderator of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and the first chair of the General Assembly Council of the reunited Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). I had the occasion of meeting a few of the Moseley Scholars, a program which has enabled many Austin College undergraduates to complete their studies and go on to do great things. In so many ways, Sara's legacy will live on.

On behalf of a grateful Church, I say, "Thank you, Sara for serving among us. Rest in the peace of our loving Lord. Well done, good and faithful servant."

*Yours in Christ's service,
The Rev. Prof. Neal D. Presa, Ph.D. Moderator, 220th General Assembly,
PC(USA)*

I would guess that all of us gathered today have been aware to a lesser or greater extent of Sara Bernice's life of extraordinary service to the Presbyterian Church, (U.S.A.). Less visible to many has been her role as mother, wife, grandmother, and great-grandmother. Whether she was playing tennis with her two-year-old grandson; sharing books and reviews with her adult granddaughter, or Calvin and Hobbs comics with a teenage grandson, or showing us pictures of her great-grandchildren with a huge smile; the love she showed for the church she focused like a laser on her family. She also served individual sisters and brothers, people with whom she corresponded all over the world, and members of the congregation here. One of our members has graciously shared her story of friendship and ministry from Sara Bernice. Here's an excerpt:

"I was aware of Sara Bernice from an early age, . . . I heard about her becoming the Moderator of General Assembly and other big things. As an adult, I was going through a hard time, and asked for a Stephen Minister to talk to. By the . . . grace of God, I was assigned to Sara Bernice. I told her I must be in trouble, they sent in the big guns! She laughed and told me no, she was just a little pistol! . . . I cherish the time I got to spend one on one with this wonderful woman! . . . Sara Bernice did some mighty fine big things in her life, but I think she excelled also at all the little things. She was a matriarch who was SO proud of her family, she was a hostess who

made anyone feel welcome, and she was a trusted friend to whom I could tell anything. She was a major figure in my faith journey, and in my life in general."

Multiply that many, many times, and you will have a sense of the many and important ways that Sara Bernice lived out her eschatology.

In 1983, at the time of reunion, Sara Bernice offered a prayer for the church that included this petition:

"God of the future--

We bring before you our dreams and visions and hopes for this new church.

Tie these dreams into the very heart of this needy world."

Each of us may have our ups and downs in the faith,
but if there is any doubt that God is in Jesus Christ reconciling the world;
any doubt that God is at work even now renewing creation;
any doubt that God is at work here among us mortal women and men
preparing us for an eternal life together;
if there is a temptation to relegate the Reign of God to a dream that
stands apart from this world,

that doubt trembles in the presence of a life lived in service to God's work of
tying our dreams into the very heart of this needy world.

Our sense of loss cannot be denied; but neither can the blessing of Sara
Bernice Moseley's 95 years of faithful service among us, pointing us to the One
who

will wipe every tear from our eyes . . . [when]

Death will be no more.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Lord's Prayer

from the *Book of Common Worship* of the Presbyterian Church (USA)

Gracious and merciful God,

before whom generations rise and pass away,
we praise you for all your servants who,
having lived this life in faith,
now live eternally with you.

Especially we thank you
for your servant Sara Bernice,
whose baptism is now complete in death.

We give you thanks for the gift of her life,
for all in her that was good
and kind and faithful,

for the grace you gave her
that kindled in her
the love of your strong name,
and enabled her to serve you faithfully.

We thank you that for Sara Bernice
death is past and pain ended,
and that she has now entered
the joy you have prepared;
Acknowledge, we humbly pray,
a sheep of your own fold,
and lamb of your own flock,
a sinner of your own redeeming.
Receive her into the arms of your mercy,
into the blessed rest of everlasting peace,
and into the glorious company
of the saints in light.

O God, we are grieving today, but
Our grief today is not for Sara Bernice.
Our grief is for ourselves.
The loss of this woman who was so gracious
and devoted and fearless
has left us feeling as though
some of the life has gone out of us.

We pray for Sara Bernice's family—
For Sara Caroline, John, and Rebecca;
For her grandchildren
and great-grandchildren,
May they be comforted by the love and prayers
of this assembled community,
and gladdened by the knowledge
that she has now entered the joy
you have prepared.

And we pray for ourselves.
Keep Moseley's memory alive among us
so that we may continue to be
warmed by her memory
and inspired by her example.

Almighty God,
in Jesus Christ you promised
many rooms within your house.
Give us faith to see,
beyond touch and sight,
some sign of your kingdom,
and, where vision fails,
to trust your love which never fails.
Lift heavy sorrow
and give us good hope in Jesus,
so we may walk our earthly way,
and look forward to glad reunion
in the life to come,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who taught us to pray together, saying,

Our Father...

Closing Prayer

Be Thou, Triune God, in the midst of us as we give thanks for those who have
gone from the sight of earthly eyes.

They, in thy nearer presence, still worship with us in the mystery of the one family in heaven and on earth... If it be Thy holy will, tell them how we love them, and how we miss them, and how we long for the day when we shall meet with them again...

God of all comfort, we lift into Thine immediate care those recently bereaved... Lift from their eyes the too distant vision of the resurrection at the last day. Alert them to hear the voice of Jesus saying, "I AM Resurrection and I AM Life:" that they may believe this. Strengthen them to go on in loving service of all Thy children. Thus shall they have communion with Thee and, in Thee, with their beloved. Thus shall they come to know, in themselves, that there is no death and that only a veil divides, thin as gossamer.

--George MacLeod (1895-1991)

Benediction

May God in endless mercy bring the whole church, the living and departed, to a joyful resurrection in the fulfillment of the eternal kingdom. Amen.

Austin College Homecoming Worship Service
October 27, 2013
Wynne Chapel

For All the Saints

GOSPEL READING *Luke 10:1-12, 17-20*

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you." But whenever you enter a town and they do not welcome you, go out into its streets and say, "Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet, we wipe off in

protest against you. Yet know this: the kingdom of God has come near.' I tell you, on that day it will be more tolerable for Sodom than for that town.

...The seventy returned with joy, saying, "Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!"

He said to them, "I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing will hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice at this, that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

EPISTLE READING-- *Hebrews 11:39-12:2*

Yet all these, though they were commended for their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better so that they would not, apart from us, be made perfect.

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

The last time Austin College had a Homecoming Weekend at which Sara Bernice Moseley was not present was just before Dwight Eisenhower was elected to his first term as President of the United States.

Last Spring was the **sixtieth** consecutive Austin College Commencement that she had seen.

Sara Bernice died on July 18 after a long and courageous battle with cancer—and after a long, glorious, rich, magnificent life.

Of course, her loss has profoundly affected Sara Caroline, John, Rebecca, and their families. Many of us on this campus and throughout the greater Austin College community have stood with them in their grief and joined them in two worship services giving thanks to God for her life and legacy—

- one at Covenant Presbyterian Church here in Sherman,
- and another at Preston Hollow Presbyterian Church in Dallas, where her ashes were laid to rest next to John D.'s.

Both of those services were beautiful, comforting, and inspiring. Sara Bernice was a lifelong Presbyterian who served the Church—both locally and nationally—in a variety of significant and groundbreaking ways, and it was appropriate for services in her honor to take place at Presbyterian churches.

But Sara Bernice's death has been a profound event for Austin College as well. Whether you know it or not, there's nobody in this room whose life has not been touched by Sara Bernice Moseley. And—although there's no doubt that we will go on—and there's every reason to believe that Austin College's best days are ahead of us—it is nevertheless appropriate for us as a College to pause for a time to publicly remember, celebrate, and give thanks to God for Sara Bernice Moseley.

There are two images in the scripture readings we've heard this morning that can help us do that.

As some of you may know, the Moseley family has given the house that John D. and Sara Bernice lived in for the last 34 years to Austin College. The College has designated Moseley House as the Chaplain's residence. And my family and I will be moving in there in the coming months.

Hebrews 12:1 talks about being "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses." I think that's a pretty good description of the huge honor, daunting prospect, and humbling opportunity we have to move into a home where only John D. and Sara Bernice have lived before.

In addition to the wonderful and elegant home itself, we'll be surrounded by the graciousness, devotion, fearlessness, commitment, innovative vision, and faithfulness that characterized their life together in that home.

And of course the cloud of Sara Bernice's witness is not limited to that home. From physical spaces like

- the Moseley Room in the Wright Campus Center
- and Moseley Green in the center of campus

to scholarships named for her and her parents, even to the anthem the choir will sing after this sermon, all of us who are part of the life of Austin College will continue to be touched and blessed and nurtured by Sara Bernice Moseley.

There's a second, less familiar image from this morning's reading that serves to help us worship God as we remember Sara Bernice.

At the beginning of Luke 10, Jesus commissions seventy disciples and sends them out in pairs to be instruments of his ministry in the various communities to which they are sent.

Apparently it went pretty well because, in verse 17, they come back and say, "Lord in your name, even the demons submit to us." (In the first century context in which Luke was writing, "demons" referred to anything that couldn't be seen but that clearly affected people in a negative way.)

And then Jesus tells the Seventy, in verse 19,

*I have given you authority
to tread upon serpents and scorpions.*

It is unlikely that Jesus is calling his followers to go into the extermination business.

This is a metaphor.

And it's a good one.

I think anybody who tells you that they've never, ever been scared of snakes is probably lying to you. And anybody who's ever been stung by a scorpion will tell you that it hurts—**bad!** In this context, snakes represent all the things that scare people. And scorpions represent all the things that hurt people.

Jesus is giving his followers authority to contend against those things. He is not giving them the authority to kill in his name, he is calling and empowering them—and calling and empowering us—

- to contend against all the things in the world that scare or hurt other people;
- to contend against all the things in the world that **diminish** people;
- that cause people to be treated as anything less than beloved and gifted children of God's.

As long as there are things in the world that scare or hurt people we will be called and empowered to struggle against those things.

We all know people who contended against all the things in the world that scare or hurt people. Those are the saints for whom we are thankful. And Sara Bernice was clearly one of those saints. At her funeral, I talked about her graciousness, and her devotion, and her fearlessness. And everybody nodded. Because they all knew her.

But Sara Bernice also recognized that there's stuff out there—not people, but stuff—that needs to be dismissed, contended against, resisted, and **trod** upon.

If we adopt Jesus' image from Luke 10, we can see Sara Bernice's graciousness as a way to tread on the serpents of callousness and dismissiveness. Her devotion was a way to tread on the scorpion of indifference, and her fearlessness was a stomp all over the serpents of timidity and fearfulness.

Those two images--the Great Cloud of Witnesses, and treading on serpents and scorpions—are useful for us as we remember and give thanks for all that Sara Bernice Moseley meant—and still means—to us.

But this is not just a service and sermon about Sara Bernice. One of the best traditions at Austin College is that, every year at Homecoming, we have this Sunday morning worship service in which we call the names of all people associated with the college—alumni, faculty, staff, students, trustees, and friends—who have died between July 1 and June 30 of the previous year. In the midst of all the excitement and busyness of a college campus, it's good for us in this service, intentionally to pause for a minute, mark

the passing of these members of our extended community—"Roo Nation," to use Dr. Hass's term—and thank God for the gift of their lives.

We gratefully acknowledge that they are all part of our "Great Cloud of Witnesses." We give thanks for their efforts to share their gifts, serve their communities, and tread upon scorpions and serpents.

Every year, we invite friends and family members of the people we will be remembering to attend this service. We read every name. We say a prayer after the list has been read. And then we always sing the same hymn: ***For All the Saints Who from Their Labors Rest.***

It's the perfect hymn for this occasion. It was actually written by an Anglican priest named William Walsham How to be part of the All Saints Day service in his church in Whittington, England on November 1, 1864. Reflecting on the line in the Apostles Creed that says "I believe in the communion of saints;" and on the image from Hebrews that we are "surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses," How wrote a hymn that beautifully articulates four themes that should be at the center of our Homecoming worship:

- Gratitude—for the gifts of those we remember today;
- Struggle—as we strive to continue and honor their legacy;
- Communion—as we renew our commitment to this Roo Nation to which we all belong, and
- Assurance—that we are not alone as we move forward in our life together.

In just a minute, we're going to sing *For All the Saints*—all six verses. I encourage you to pay attention to all the words as we sing the hymn. But I want to call your attention in particular to the final, sixth verse.

In that verse, we'll sing:

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long

Sometimes it's hard to be saints. It's hard to be a liberal arts college in 2013. There are still serpents and scorpions out there. Sometimes we might lose heart.

But

***When the strife is fierce, the warfare long
Steals on the ear, the distant triumph song***

We know saints. We know Sara Bernice Moseley. We know the others who we remember today—who ran the race with perseverance, lived lives of service, and made the world better than it could have been. That's clearly part of the whole truth.

When the strife is fierce, the warfare long

***Steals on the ear, the distant triumph song
And hearts are brave again and arms are strong***

That's the truth that we remember in this and every Homecoming service.

We get together in here;

- we remember our Great Cloud of Witnesses;
 - our saints;
- we note their passing with reverence, gratitude, and renewed commitment;
- we hear their distant song;
- and then we go out from here—surrounded— to stomp on the serpents and scorpions that are still out there.

To be sure, we've got work left to do. But we've also got the means—and the models—to continue to tread upon serpents and scorpions.

Alleluia! Alleluia!

It's good to be us.
Amen.