

## **Eulogy for Amy Smith, September 18, 2021**

Dear friends and family of Amy,

Every once in a while a single dreadful discovery - one word, one CT, one MRI scan changes everything in a life and upends one's plans for the future. Sadly, that day came, unexpected, unannounced, like a thunderbolt from a clear blue sky in April of 2019 for our dear friend Amy. I remember her telling me casually in an email that she had to go get a tumor removed from her brain, she would be in the hospital for a few days, not to worry! It was vintage Amy. She sounded like she was bringing her car to the shop for an oil change, but I learned the full, sad diagnosis before long. Glioblastoma, the most dreaded name among brain cancers, a sword hanging over her head. At that point the question was only how long she might be able to stave off the deadly disease and what the quality of her life would be like. They told her it could be anywhere from a few months to three years but Amy, ever-optimistic Amy, fully expected to be around for three years and then "let's go from there." She loved life. She loved God. She loved people. She loved Tim. She loved being. And she would do everything in her power to extend this gift as long as humanly possible. Before this tumor she was at a very good place in her life.

Amy would enjoy another two years and hang on for an additional three months, every single one of those days treasured by her husband Tim and many others who came to see her. When it was time for her to close her eyes, it was a relief. Cancer does that to you, especially one that messes with your brain and slowly takes your ability to speak and move, your memory, everything. And so we are here today to remember a wonderful life lived in the light of God, a life that began in the little town of Minerva in northeastern Ohio.

Amy Carol Smith was born on July 13, 1951 to Wendell and Ruby Smith. She was one of four children, together with her sisters Melissa and Sarah and her brother Andrew. Growing up in small town America like that, with the church as an important place for the formation of her beliefs and convictions, forging her character and value system, she felt a nudge to become a minister. She wanted to help people, bless people, bring courage and comfort to the community. There was only one tiny little problem with that in the 1950's: it's called gender. Female

pastors were not allowed to serve in most churches, including most Methodist denominations. With the formation of the United Methodist Church in 1968 – Amy was 17 at the time – that changed. Getting ordained, serving a parish, suddenly became an option, a possible career path for women of faith. Amy was in the first wave of the female pioneers in UMC pulpits.

In the year when Amy was born, 1951, Methodists launched the first “Me Too” movement, except it was called “US-2,” designed to train young, aspiring Methodist women in mission, service and ministry. Amy joined that program right out of High School and served in Hazleton, PA for two years. She must have enjoyed the experience, because soon afterwards she went to Seminary in Dayton, Ohio and never looked back. Her career as a pastor reads like the log of an early Methodist circuit rider. She served a total of nine congregations, from her first parish in Bethlehem, PA, to many other calls in the Eastern Pennsylvania conference: Wayne, Lansdowne, West Philadelphia, West Chester, Havertown, Hatboro, Phoenixville. It was an impressive career, which also included several positions of responsibility above the parish level. And in between she worked on a PHD in Sociology. Never afraid to serve and getting involved even with mundane, unheralded tasks, she was an experienced and professional leader with an ability to calmly organize, find consensus and getting things done. In the course of her career she forged many life-long friendships.

One of Amy’s traits was - I think I can use that term here among friends and family: she was a penny pincher. She was as frugal as they come. There is a funny story from her time in Hazleton as a young US-2 servant. Living in downtown Hazleton, paying the princely sum of \$ 45 a month for rent, she hated the idea of paying for parking. One day, she parked in a wrong spot for just a few minutes and – the Hazleton police had nothing else to do – she found a ticket on her windshield and was definitely upset about it. With the righteous anger of a young aspiring pastor she stomped into the police building, fully expecting to resolve the matter. Well, it got resolved all right: her request was declined by a friendly officer. “Sorry ma’am!” When Amy returned to her car, she was greeted by a second parking ticket. In her zeal to appeal the first ticket she had totally forgotten to move her car. And now she had to pay both. Lesson learned: don’t mess with the Hazleton police!

While the wonderful work of ministry filled her soul to the brim, there was an unfulfilled yearning inside of her throughout much of her early adult years. She was longing for a partner, a husband, a companion for life, and that proved to be

difficult. Often she confided in her journal mentioning that she was lonely. A prolific writer, she left behind a stack of journals written over many years, the records of her heart. Of course she dated frequently, and in the early 90's she had a marriage that lasted only four years, leaving her once again deeply frustrated, maybe even arguing and pleading with God, "Do you want me to be unhappy, Lord?" God in his infinite wisdom finally answered, "If you really want to be happy, Amy, I have someone for you. But see, it's not someone you'd expect. He's not tall. He's not interested in church. He doesn't know much about art. In fact, I hate to break it to you: he's an engineer!"

Before long she would meet said engineer who quickly fell in love with her, Timothy Caum. In the days before online dating, they met through a service called "Let's go Dutch!" In case you wonder, the expression "Let's go Dutch" means that everybody pays their own bill...

They each had signed up to meet a number of eligible singles. Amy had paid for five and Tim for ten dates. She was Tim's third date and, after he made up his mind and concluded that he really enjoyed this woman, he stopped the dating business. Amy, far from being charmed, went all Dutch and scolded him, "Are you going to leave your money on the table? You have seven more to go!" We all know how it ended. It ended in a wonderful marriage which began in 1997 after two years of dating. And since there is only one person alive who can describe what that was like, I will read the beautiful words Tim wrote shortly after Amy had passed.

*"Amy and I had 26 wonderful years together. We shared everything in our marriage. We had no strict division of who was responsible for this or that. We just got everything done, no arguing. We went so many places together, had so much fun. And the physical affection we had for each other. Well, I won't go into that here. Let's just say there was a lot!"*

*Then in April of 2019 she was diagnosed with Glioblastoma brain cancer. A death sentence with an uncertain time frame. She listened as they told her that most people live about a year before succumbing to the disease. Then with optimism in her voice she said "I think I will have several more good years."*

*She was nothing if not optimistic. A foil to my pessimism. For the next two years as the disease slowly took her ability to read, to write, to solve problems, to see, and to hear, she remained optimistic. She never got mad or depressed at her situation, Lord knows I would have. When she could no longer read the New*

*Yorker, she switched to the simpler sentence structure of Time Magazine. When she could no longer do the Meryl Regal crossword puzzles, she switched to the simple 7x7 puzzles. She never complained or got depressed. When she could no longer answer cards sent to her in cursive with a thankyou note in cursive, she never complained or got depressed. When she could no longer read even simple sentences, she started listening to books on tape. I watched this happen to her and I was so upset and angry, but she wasn't.*

*Towards the end when she could no longer even listen to her books on tape, she would lie on the sofa and sleep or have her eyes half open, and when I came up to her she would smile at me and look happy. I don't know how she did it. Shortly before she passed away pastor Andreas came to see her. He had a hymnal in his hand so he could sing to her. He said "Amy I'm afraid it's the Lutheran hymnal not the Methodist hymnal". And with the remaining mouth function on her left side she smiled at him. Then in two days she was gone. My God I loved her, and I miss her so much." Tim Caum*

Today, our hearts are grieving with Tim. It was a loss he prepared for over more than two years, but it's a loss that hurts and will hurt in the days to come. However, if God had spoken to Tim all those years ago after his divorce, when he found himself single again and filled with that human longing for love, affection and companionship – and if God had said to Tim, "If you really want to be happy sir, I have someone for you. But it's not someone you'd expect. First, she doesn't care about engineering. Second, she likes light-hearted romance books, which you hate. Third, she's not a beer drinker. In fact, I hate to break it to you, sit down please: she's a Methodist pastor!" "And that's not all," God continued. "There is more. She will die of a terrible disease after many, many happy years with you..." If God had told Tim all these things in 1997, I tell you, he would have happily accepted the deal. For the happiness and contentment of all those years and all those days and nights spent together have an eternal quality. They will stay with him as long as he lives, and I believe, beyond that. But Tim and I may argue over the meaning of "beyond" with the help of an IPA some other day...

For us, for today, we bring her back to her creator and redeemer. We bless her and we send her to a place bigger than this one, invisible to our eyes, glimpsed only every once in a while by those lucky individuals who have the veils taken off from their eyes. Today, we can feel that she is with God and that feeling must

suffice. It's a good place to be. It's a place of grace and love. May God bless you Amy. You have been a wonderful human being and a wonderful servant of God.

**Amen.**