

The Body of Christ

The shade trees in the churchyard hid us for a moment of honesty, my grandmother Nony and I.

“Walking out of the service, saying ‘Nice to see you,’ and going home is the loneliest time of my week,” she confessed.

It was May when we moved my grandfather, Eddie, to Carillon Assisted Living. That day, Nony came home and cried. On the following Sunday, the women of Eno Presbyterian covered her with a red prayer scarf and many embraces. They knew that for husbands and wives, dementia means slow grief.

Eddie has been away for one year and three months, and the Eno Presbyterian Church has shared in the Eucharist five times—once a quarter, right on schedule. After all, it’s an institution.

Aids feed Eddie his meals, now, right on schedule: 8:30, 11:30 and 5:00, with sweet tea and cake in between. White heads fill the small dining room, like old children. Sometimes, slumped over in his wheel chair asleep, Eddie doesn’t eat. I wonder how long his body can last like this.

And Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, “This is my body, given for you; do this in remembrance of me.”

Pastor Grill recited these words last Sunday, while familiar faces gathered around the table. Fresh bread, grape juice.

This time, though, Donald seemed to hold back. His back and neck still ached from a recent fall. After the last hymn, he quietly tucked half of his bread into the Reverend's hand.

"This is for Eddie."

Funny, all of us felt like family, clustered together in Carillon's dining room. A small silver plate with Robert's bread sat on the edge of the table. We waited, to see if Eddie would respond to the words of the institution, and take the bread placed between his lips. He did. With deliberateness, Pastor Grill pulled a sip of juice into a straw with his finger, and released it into Eddie's mouth. He swallowed, and we gave thanks.

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. God has put the body together, giving greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it. If one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.