

Elizabeth Perry Fleming: April 29, 1992 – October 31, 2008
November 3, 2008
Fr. M. Dow Sanderson

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My dear friends,

As we gather here to share our grief, I am sure that you will understand and empathize when I say to you that I wish I were not standing in this pulpit this morning. We are all at a loss for words. We all find our hearts broken, numb, and desperate for sensible answers. We all wish that on this rainy Monday, we were going about our usual mundane duties, in the classroom, in the office, anywhere but here.

But here we are. Gathered together. Saying our prayers. Offering God our tears. And crying out to Him for the healing that He wishes to bring.

For my part, I wish this morning to make just three points:

-I want to talk about – to state the obvious- what a beautiful child of God Lizzy Fleming was...

-I want to talk about how fragile and broken all of us human beings are...

-And I want to talk about what God has done to redeem our brokenness.

So, to begin with Lizzy...

There is a montage of photographs of our youth group on one of the bulletin boards down the hall. It is not a part of the special tributes that many of you put up yesterday (which are wonderful, by the way) But these are just regular pictures of the youth of this parish over the years.

I was struck yesterday, as I looked at them again, that not only is Lizzy in practically every single picture. She is **front** and **center** in nearly every picture! Her eyes are the widest... her smile is the biggest. Her energy the most electric.

She was a beautiful, talented, witty, charming, smart young woman. She had a wonderful family that loved her deeply. She had a church family that adored her...And heavens above... have you ever seen anybody with so many friends?

So, how could this happen?

Well, as I said, we are fragile, we human beings. Do any of you know Ingrid Michaelson's song, "Breakable"?

We are so fragile. Our cracking bones make noise. We are breakable, breakable, breakable girls and boys.

It's true. And there are times when all of us are overwhelmed by circumstances.

We are told in scripture that even Jesus was so overcome by the magnitude of what he was to face that his sweat was like blood.

Life is a beautiful gift. But it is not without its painful moments.

And sometimes, *very* painful moments.

But friends, I must say this... Lizzy made a terribly wrong choice.

I know this is painful, and I would much prefer not to say anything about it at all, but I have to. It would be irresponsible if I didn't

It would be irresponsible because there seems to be some perverse, misguided, notion among some in our culture... particularly our youth culture... that taking one's own life can be some sort of tragically romantic gesture. That it can be noble.

That is a lie. It is neither noble nor romantic. It is cruel and deeply wrong. And it is a particularly evil thing to suggest to another human being- especially a wounded and impressionable one- that it is any kind of solution to our problems.

Our lives, popular opinion to the contrary, are not ours. They are Gods. We may NOT do with them as we wish. And may I say, as we have cried and grieved, we may be sure that God has cried with us. For this was not his will for Lizzy.

So what has God **done** about our fragile and broken lives? How has he intervened?

He has intervened by coming into this world in the person of Jesus Christ in a form just as fragile as us *breakable girls and boys*.

Isn't that what any parent tries to do... to take the pain of the children upon him or herself?

Well that is actually what Jesus did.

As many of you know, Lizzy had a beautiful voice. And she had, not long ago joined our adult choir. Three or so weeks ago, we sang a hymn which Lizzy liked. Her mother picked it as one of the hymns we will sing again today... we will sing it as we carry her out of the church.

It is called *My Song is Love Unknown*. It is about how Jesus cared so deeply for us... and was so moved by our plight, that he was willing to endure the cruelest treatment on our behalf...

Just a few of the words:

Why, what hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite? He made the lame to run, he gave the blind their sight?...

*In life, no house, no home my Lord might have;
In death, no friendly tomb, but what a stranger gave. What can I say? Heaven was his home. But mine the tomb wherein he lay.*

As deep and profound as our grief is today... we have some place to take it. We have some ONE to take it, who is well acquainted with grief.

We believe that he not only died for us, but that he is even now risen and victorious. And in this requiem mass today he continues to come among us.

The rituals and prayers that you will hear this morning are two thousand years old. And we believe that in just a few moments, that ordinary bread and wine will be transformed into his living presence. And as we come forward to

this communion rail to receive his Body and Blood, we reach our hand across the altar rail as if we were reaching our hands into heaven. And we take the hand of Christ, who has Lizzy's hand. And through him we are united with all those we love and hold dear.

And so Elizabeth Perry Fleming... our Lizzy... may angels and saints greet you at your coming... my our Lord wipe away your tears and ours...and until we see each other again on that other shore... may God hold and keep us all.

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