

## Subversive Hope

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*Hope is subversive, for it limits the grandiose pretensions of the present, daring to announce that the present to which we have all made commitments is now called into question.*

*Walter Brueggemann*

I'm certain I wasn't thinking of hope when the doctors told my mother she had six months to live. I did not hope that she would live longer – her cancer was far advanced and too painful – only that she would not be afraid but peaceful when the time came.

Denial of death makes us think we have all the time in the world to meet our destiny. Life meanders like a tourist skipping along streets like ice on hot asphalt, moving this way or that at the whim of whatever distraction catches its eye. More often, it slips the key into the lock, sighs and sinks down into its favorite well-worn chair, safe in the predictability of its days.

But death comes still: an impatient lover at the front door offering his tuxedoed arm to the lady: tendering one white camellia onto her absent left breast.

My mother died two months later.

Hope is subversive, yet gracious, in the radical way it undoes life. It absorbed my days and years of caretaking, not into irrelevancy exactly, but into a spacious emptiness beyond the limits of my experience and memory. Freed from the demands of a relentless present - doctor's appointments, daily trips to the hospital for radiation therapy, and worry about finances – I was able to simply be with my mother. Long-silent voices, telling stories of desire and disappointment, of sorrow and joy, spoke into being a loving acceptance long sought and graciously received.

I remember thinking, when death came, "I've never seen my mother so peaceful." The body that bore me was gone; the death that unmoored me was done. I wondered, how am I going to live into a future so radically different that I can't even imagine it?

A great loss draws us back to the essential question: in whom or what will you place your ultimate trust and confidence? For people of faith, hope is God-grounded, God-sustained and God-directed. It is defined not so much by the distinct shape of specific desires or expectations as by the remembrance of what God has done for us, our reliance on God's promises for the future and our response to God's creative and sustaining power.

Grief clouds the heart's ability to remember, rely on, and respond to God's promises. Unredeemed, it devolves into despair: a refusal to accept the Impossible. Yet radical hope gently reminds us that nothing is impossible with God. Accepting the gift opens us to God's creative energy and the possibilities of a life-giving future.

Hope proffers one white lily, waiting for my answer.