

## ***First and Center***

Pastor's Blog

March 19, 2019



This Lent, we are going to be saying farewell to two strong women who have been part of Center Church for many years. Pat Anderson and Joyce Peroza, good friends, both died of cancer. Both were larger than life in so many ways. Both will be missed not only by their families and close friends, but by our church community as well.

You know the old saying that every strong woman stands on the shoulders of a strong woman before her. Perhaps the same can be said about men, but I haven't heard it that way. I am acutely aware, every time I step up to preach, of all the women going back generations who have carried the stories of the gospel and lived the life of discipleship, and served the church and its members. Most of them never stepped into a pulpit. Some would not have wanted to. Some would have dearly loved to, but were denied by a system that put boundaries on the sorts of discipleship they could exercise: sing, teach children, cook, clean the silver.

But, oh my, the women who did those things carried the gospel forward as much or more as those preachers. Why is it that teaching children is considered something women were allowed to do, but that men, for many years and even today, often did not see as their role? Pat and Joyce taught children, they cooked, and their lives mirrored the kind of love that Jesus called us to have. They were servant leaders. Pat was highly theologically educated and shared that knowledge in so many ways. Joyce knew Jesus through love more than books and shared that love in so many ways.

Sometimes I joke that I rarely use the pulpit at Center Church because there is a legend that Thomas Hooker may be buried where the church expanded in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and built that mammoth pulpit. I don't want to stand on him because I know he would be utterly horrified that a woman was in the pulpit of Center Church. We stand on him in other ways as one of our ancestors in the faith here, but I have my little act of subversion most Sundays.

However, I am deeply honored to stand on the shoulders of Pat and Joyce, though I did not know them very long. In the time I did, they taught me, and they lifted me up. Others at Center Church can tell many stories of how they stand on their shoulders. Rest in peace, good and faithful servants.

Rev. Shelly Stackhouse,  
Transitional Minister