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*Minister Emeritus*

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**THE FIRST CHURCH OF NAZARETH, U.L.C.**

St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands  
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Good afternoon and welcome to you all who have joined us for this important event. At this time I will ask God to grant us the wisdom and guidance necessary for this service to perform its function completely; that we may leave here today without excessive grieving, and with love in our hearts for Lola's memory and her friends and family.

From the Psalms--*God is our refuge and strength, an everpresent help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, and the mountains quake with their surging. Psalm 46 1-3*

Death is a powerful friend to humanity. Without death, each of us would have more difficulty understanding what is truly valuable in life. Without death, we would sink into complacency, believing life is fair, assuming everything will be tomorrow just as it is today, putting off our thank-yous and damn-yous until some unremembered nether time.

Who among us has not thought, just for a moment because it's all we can stand, what it will be like to embrace death- to feel no more life's pricks and strokes, to not BE. An empty feeling engrosses us, a tottering upon great height. A nameless, shameless fear compels us to think elsewhere and meet not the end.

And yet, without death we would never know the limits of the human experience. We would never have a yardstick to measure against loss. In the aftermath of the hurricane, did we grieve for our sodden magazines and saturated stereos? Not for long! Because we were happy to be alive: we had faced the demon and come out breathing. A taste of death had given us a truer taste of life.

The loss of a friend or a loved one, without warning especially, creates a hurricane within each of us. A swirling lament of "what for" and "if only" and "why" that plays in our heads and weighs on our hearts with callous abandon.

And abandonment. "How can she be gone, and I be left behind?" We ask. We punish ourselves for accidents of inches and hours and dollars. We pity ourselves for having to go on, more alone than we were before.

Which brings us here. To this place, at this time. To care and share and compare our grief at the loss each of us must own...alone.

I have here a talking stick. In Native American practises, a talking stick is passed from hand to hand throughout the group. This stick is from Jamaica, but it will serve us just as well. Whoever holds the stick may speak without interruption for as long as necessary. If the stick is passed to you and you do not wish to speak, you may pass it on, or hold it in silence for a while. I would like each person here to touch this stick for a moment, at least, as a symbol of the bond which brought us together today. When the stick comes to you, you may say anything that's in your mind, as short as a word, or as long as you need to share your feelings. Don't limit yourself to sentiments of sadness or outrage, I think that would be out of keeping with the Lola spirit. If you can make us all laugh, so much the better. If not, so be it. After each of us has held the stick, I'll say a few more words and we'll be finished with this service.

**PASSES THE TALKING STICK**

According to Christian belief, life in this world is a prelude to eternal life hereafter: *Jesus said to her: "I am the resurrection and the life, whosoever believes in me will live, even having died; and whoever lives and believes in me, will never die."* John 11. 25-26

Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing; that you may abound in hope, through the power of Love. AMEN