Gloria Mims

We were at the Hollywood Bowl on Wednesday for the Louis Armstrong tribute concert, and I thought about Gloria often. One of the first things I discovered about her when I came to live in Pasadena sixteen years ago was that she loved music, because she was involved in the leadership of the fabulous blues events held at the home of Tina Mayfield not far from here. Ann and I used to go to those events as the token white people with about 1,998 African Americans, and there I became acquainted with one of Gloria’s own favorites, Barbara Morrison. Gloria’s involvement in the organizing of these events was typical of the energy and drive that she showed as President of Women in Action and many other community activities that are listed in the obituary. She showed the same tough-mindedness when she decided it was time to give up such leadership and let a younger generation take over.

Gloria was the kind of person whom you were glad to have on your side and about whom you would be worried if she was on the other side. She loved you, and she shot straight. She was a committed member of St Barnabas for over fifty years. She of course had that big voice of her own that we heard in St Barnabas, singing solo as well as leading in singing. During the last two years when I have been priest in charge at St Barnabas, she has come to vestry meetings just a couple of times, but you wouldn’t be surprised if, when she came, she would have some straight things to say. I vividly remember her challenging the vestry about the fact that the congregation is declining in numbers as the number of people passing on exceeds the number of people joining the church. We have to reach out to the community, she said forcefully.

On Wednesday evening at the Bowl I thought of Gloria as Dr John and the Blind Boys of Alabama and Dee Dee Bridgwater sang “When the Saints Go Marching In.” In her last hours, for a while Gloria said she wasn’t ready to go yet. She has of course been fighting to stay for the past year or two, and she hasn’t wanted to be treated as someone fighting a battle that she was losing. Yet there is a sense in which she was certainly ready, because our readiness doesn’t come from whether we feel ready to face God but from the fact that God is happy to face us, because we are people Jesus died for.

There’s another sense in which she was ready. She was ready to join Don and her grandmother and other people she loved. When the saints go marching in, she will be among their number, all right. I love that image of the saints marching in. There’s another song about John Brown’s body a-mouldering in the grave while his soul goes marching on, but a soul can’t march unless it has a body. The life left Gloria’s body last week but that’s not the end of the story of her body. There is going to come a day when we all get resurrection bodies, and then we’re all going to march in all right.

I thought of Gloria again at the end of the concert as they sang “Down by the Riverside.” Gloria has laid down her burdens now and she’s crossed the river. She’s asleep in peace with Jesus and with Don until the day we all take part in that resurrection, and I’m expecting she will have a few sharp things to say to us then. It will be a great reunion.