

November 1, All Saints (Luke 6:20-31)

My friend Mollie didn't need to be a minister. She was already a fisher of people.

by [Mary Barnett](#) in the [November 2025](#) issue

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My earliest friend was a girl named Mollie, who I met at the beach the summer I turned three. She came and stood by my blanket and smiled down at me. She looked huge, framed by the sun from where I sat squinting up at her: a gigantically tall four-year-old with strawberry blond hair snapping in the wind.

“C'mon,” she said, “let's go.”

And then she turned and raced down to the water's edge, and, as I remember it, I just stood up, left my family and all my possessions—my sandy peanut butter sandwich, my green plastic pail, and my mother—and ran barefoot down to the edge of the water, right down to the edge of my world.

Our parents became friends, chasing after us that summer as we attempted to throw our three- and four-year-old selves into the waves unattended. We spent the next 15 summers racing around in the woods and sailing out into the mash of multidirectional waves and crosscurrents that is Buzzards Bay, Massachusetts, bodysurfing through a treacherous adolescence. We remained close through lackluster colleges and challenging married lives, until she died at 54, leaving behind three beautiful children.

It was a horrible death for her and a horrible loss for me, and though I have had other important losses, this one was different. For one thing, I didn't get to say goodbye adequately. I didn't have the courage to push back against her insular family and insist on a place at the small gathering around her hospital bed as she left this world. And I should have. If you are ever in that same situation, push. You belong there.

Sometimes as the result of not being able to be there or of simply being afraid of the whole situation, afraid that the sorrow will break us permanently and wash us entirely away, our grief becomes frozen like petrified wood. We may carry it with us and within us for a long time. It may meet up inside us with other unwept griefs and build a wall. I know that after Mollie's death, I froze up inside.

During Mollie's funeral, I suddenly felt compelled to stand up. I couldn't take her passing sitting down—I wanted to protest. I stood in a sharp, dark corner of the small country church in a town that I thought was, like her marriage, never big enough for her. My eyes were as dry and unyielding as stone.

Mollie would have been an amazing minister, I thought. She was a natural for it. But she had no pull in that direction. She was happy raising her kids and being the middle school science teacher who took her students outside whenever possible, bringing them back to the classroom covered in mud with stinky jars full of God's glory to analyze in the lab. She didn't care what denomination she belonged to. As their family moved around the country, following her husband's lumber business, she would earnestly visit different churches and finally settle at whichever one felt the least pretentious.

She didn't need to be a minister because she already was one. She was a fisher of people. She was already ministering to the lady in the checkout line, to the man with the misbehaving dog, to the postman with ADHD

who kept losing the mail, and of course to me. I was the one who eventually needed to go to school for it, to learn how to be a better person because I couldn't stand a world without her light in it.

A few months before she died, Mollie and I were looking out over the marshes where the phragmites, hollow tubes of marsh grasses, were waving. Phragmites live by sucking the brackish seawater up their long hollow tubes to feed their shaggy, tufted tops. They are an invasive species, like the cancer that was hollowing her out. It was a halting conversation, about ultimate things, at the edge of the water and at the edge of our lives. *What was the purpose of it all? Why had we been so hollowed out by loss? Why were we here?*

"I guess we are here to be conduits for love," she said, shrugging.

I've never found a better explanation than that.

Blessed are the meek. The cursed. The poor. The hungry. The sick. The lost. The rejected.

I stood, shaking with a kind of impotent fury, in the corner of that very unforgiving church, listening to the minister drone on and on. And then the song "Here I am, Lord" began: "Who will bear my light to them? / Whom shall I send? / Here I am, Lord." And I lost it. It became so clear: that was her. I cried so hard the front of my dress got all wet. Mollie's abundance came rushing back to me, like water seeping over the gunnels of a boat because the boat is already so weighted down with fish. Blessed are those who weep.