

Your Daily Church Epistle

08.19.2020

Hello Church!

Yesterday, it was my honor to conduct a funeral for Scott Wood at the Bakken & Young Funeral Home in New Richmond, and then drive myself out to Scott's childhood hometown, Clear Lake, for his burial. Scott's death was sudden and cardiac related, so for his service we read the traditional texts, Psalm 23 and John 14. Those two passages are exceptionally good scriptures for a family plunged into the deep end of grief with no warning. I had lots of time to ponder dying as the great unknown for each of us as I drove myself from the funeral home to the cemetery and then home to Hudson—because of COVID social distancing the pastor is not riding to the cemetery with the funeral director!

Psalm 23 and John 14 are scriptures for all of us who are alive now. They are about how we live as we cope with our love that survived another person's death. They are Scriptures that are very much about finding Christ our Lord present as whenever we walk "in the valley of the shadow of death" on the way to "My Father's house."

Here are some of my thoughts on walking with Christ our Lord from my Tuesday sermon:

"But here is a secret from the experience of other families who have faced a sudden death, to grieve well keep going outdoors just like you did so often with Scott. Going outdoors will bring you to places where your grief will find solace as you feel his spirit linger with you. Outdoors is where memories of joy will bring you comfort and gratitude. Outdoors is where the broad sky above always reminds us that we are part of a great creation, a mystery fully within our imagination and yet beyond our comprehension at the same time. In grief, and especially at the death of a man who so enjoyed being outdoors, going outdoors is a wonderful place where the Lord will meet and comfort you."

Psalm 23 was written by a shepherd who genuinely enjoyed being outdoors. Read carefully what he wrote about finding God outside:

"The Lord makes me to lie down in green pastures:
he leads me beside the still waters.
"The Lord restores my soul . . ." (verses 2 & 3a)

While looking for clipart for the print copy of the sermon, there was one line drawing that spoke to me. It was for use on a children's Sunday school lesson, not really clipart for a

funeral sermon. In this line drawing there was the sun and one fluffy cloud in the sky. There was a single line to suggest a hilly horizon, while a pair of squiggly lines with a small wave suggested a stream with still waters. A pair of sheep that strongly resembled the cloud were grazing. In the center of all this, the shepherd was laying down, hands clasped behind his head, and a smile on his face.

As sermon clipart, it seemed a bit too cartoonish for a family who had just lost a husband/father/brother/friend who was alive and appeared to be well last Thursday evening. But as I drove across our beautiful county with that huge sky over hayfields and cornfields the idea of a shepherd laying down in the pasture with his sheep grazing nearby followed me like my childhood German shepherd when I went for a walk “alone.”

One thought came back to me from late March, how can we take this time of so much social distancing and use it as an opportunity for spiritual renewal? That was the starting question behind beginning the Daily Church Epistle. Rather than look at what was going wrong or how hard this time is, the DCE was begun to help each of us embrace this opportunity to “lie down in green pastures” and allow “the Lord (to restore) my soul.”

How are you doing with that idea? Is your daily grind trying to creep back in as we all long for “normal?”

There are many spiritual practices one can try to know God better. None of them are a once and done. Not only can good spiritual practices be embraced again and again, with each new time we use them their influence in our souls grows stronger. In one early DCE I strongly encouraged us all to go outdoors. Somehow in the super heat of July, that is one practice that slipped away for me as it does every year, just like normal. Does it for you? I detest sticky heat. I honestly prefer January day with an arctic vortex than a July day with 70+ percent humidity. Because my ancestors are from north of the Arctic Circle I think it is genetic, but it could just be their influence in my attitude.

But now is August, the “Sunday of summer” with beautiful mornings and glowing sunsets. Once again, I have found the framed view of the morning sky full of flying birds from the glider rocker on my deck. I enjoying that the best view of sunset in my neighborhood, the one a walker sees when walking clockwise around E.P. Rock while the sun says goodbye until tomorrow. I am not sure I want to stretch out with the stick figure shepherd on the grass with my fingers locked behind my head—I have so many good old woman reasons—but then again why not? Cloud watching is better in person than on a screen. Clouds drifting give us a God’s eye view of today’s sorrows and joys.

Friends, today while you still can, please take time to go outside and really see the sky. Christ is waiting there to meet you, ready to walk with you on your way to His Father’s house.

Grace abounds!

Rev. Dawn