

Your Daily Church Epistle

24 August 2020

Hello Church!

Today I am writing from “the shadow of the valley of death” (Psalm 23:3 KJV). But it is not David’s famous psalm I find myself mulling over. Rather I am pondering these verses:

“When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established.
What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:3,4 NRSV)

You all should be aware that we have an active death watch going on in my late mom’s family. Her brother-in-law, my Uncle Ray, has accepted that his life is coming to an end. But true to who Uncle Ray is, rather than choosing the comforts of the hospice nearest his hometown—the hospice is in Duluth and his hometown is Grand Marais—he has elected to use palliative care in Grand Marais at the same skilled nursing facility where Aunt Eleanor has needed to live for the last two years following her catastrophic stroke. Only death will keep him from being with her. They had a son and a daughter, but Steve passed from cancer about 18 months ago, so now their daughter cares for them both. She needs her two girl cousins, my sister and myself, and our experience with dying parents.

So, there you go—or rather there I go—off to Duluth and Grand Marais. My family caregiving for my uncle is much less than when my sister, our living brother, and I shared Daddy’s care as he died ten or so years after Mom, but it also has a familiarity. For me the familiarity includes hours of driving familiar roads through a place on earth that I was raised to call “God’s country.” Heaven is plainly seen on every horizon. From here to our best restaurant for social distancing in Duluth is a drive on memory lane no matter if I take I-35 or WI-35. There is plenty of time to think while always arriving on time for our meet up.

That drive, especially from Taylors Falls to Duluth, made me realize that if my heart is open, I can see God is always mindful of my family and my church, equipping me to do what needs to be done for both.

Even though COVID took away my customary latte stop, my drive through Taylors Falls brought back memories of when I took one of my paid time off days every week six years ago while Daddy was in home hospice care. My church then was never negatively

impacted, and after Daddy died there was still a week of vacation left that I took after Christmas. That week became the gift of our last Christmas spent with all three of our children and it was graced an opportunity to spend a precious last day on earth with a childhood friend.

I have faith that the same God who cared for the mortals I loved that year is still caring for us all now.

Like you, our Ramstad family calendar has many moving parts. And like your work, my work has seasons that are more or less demanding. The marvel to me is that God seems to have all this calendaring all worked out. One can see God working the days if only one's heart is open.

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:4)

So that is a bit of where I see God this week. I am also amazed that my uncle, an only child, found the family he longed for on his first day of first grade when he met my aunt for the first time. They married when they were twenty, 72 years ago last February. When I was four years old, I thought Uncle Ray was Superman's best friend, mostly because Uncle Ray is 6' 8" and unlike the rest of our family he spent more time listening than talking. I was forced to fill in his silence with my own imagination—and I adored Superman! I was certain Uncle Ray also had a secret identity like Clark Kent.

My four-year-old self was right, in a way. She was at least wise enough to see there might be more to the story that her eyes could see. I did promise mom to keep some of those family stories quiet “so no one else can be hurt.” But I also know from Daddy's side where we keep no secrets, that every human family has stories of pain overcome by God's great grace moving among us, mindful of us all, and caring for our needs.

May grace abound!

Rev. Dawn