

I shouldn't admit this, but I have a favorite tree. His name is Bill. How do I know his name? Well, the first time I met him it was obvious that he was a Bill. It's as simple as that. Bill doesn't live close to me, but I see him regularly. We've known each other for quite some time. When I first noticed him he was in full, radiant fall foliage and brilliant color. An almost perfectly shaped tree, Bill is a handsome guy. When the sun shines on his leaves, he illuminates the area around him. We've all known people like that. The minute they walk into the room you feel better. Instinctively, they know how to make everyone feel accepted and loved. If Bill was a person and not a tree, that would describe him.

Over the years my friend Marlyce and I have taken to watching Bill change colors every fall. Not in stalker fashion, but as observers of nature we update one another on his colorful progression. But the last few years we've noticed changes in Bill. He hasn't had many leaves. In fact, the last couple of years he's been leaf-less.

"Have you seen Bill lately?" Marlyce asked one day.

"Yeah, I have. What's wrong with him?"

"I don't know," she replied with worry in her voice.

"I wonder how Marie's doing?" I asked.

Marie's the tree who lives down the block. She and Bill usually send their leaves up and down the street via the wind. That's how I believe they communicate, through leaf-talk. We, Marlyce and I, have long thought that Bill and Marie are sweet on one another. So it's only natural to also be concerned about Marie. A change in Bill affects her as well. Short of stopping and knocking on the door and asking the people who live in Marie's yard what's going on, we don't have any further information. So, we've watched him go from the prime of his life to leaf-less.

I admire trees. Think of the hope it takes to be a leafy tree. You have these wonderful leaves that change into magnificent colors in the fall. And just when they're so beautiful that passersby are amazed at their beauty, you have to let them go and allow them to fall to the ground and die. What great hope it takes for a tree to do that. To let go. To believe that after a long winter that spring will come again. That they, the tree, will produce leaves once again. Hope. Courage. Faith. Love.

It's not unlike our human lives here on earth. If we believe in the creator of trees and everything else, we know that life here on earth is for a season. We live our lives in our prime, never thinking about what comes next. We don't worry about fall coming, or winter. We just shine in the sun and enjoy life. Then one day we notice that we're not as quick as we once were. Things we take for granted are suddenly challenging. We realize that there are more springs and summers behind us than in front of us. Just like Bill the tree, we're slowing down. But that doesn't mean we don't have something to offer.

I imagine Bill sharing his secrets of his many successful transitions from fall into winter and then into spring again with younger trees. I see him demonstrating through his own life about the

courage and hope, the faith and love it takes to face another winter, believing that spring will eventually come.

And I imagine Bill showing all of us that even though he may not have a lot of time left on this earth, he's still living a grace-filled life with hope, courage, faith, wisdom and love.

In James 1:5 it reads, "*If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.*" I pray for wisdom and discernment so that I will know that I'm on the path the Lord has for me. Also because I sometimes meet people who need help and I want to offer them Godly wisdom.

If I meet any more trees, I'll point them to Bill. As for people, I'll point them to the one who created Bill, all trees, everything and people, too. The God of heaven and earth. The one who has no beginning and no end. The one who is and shall be forever and ever. The one who is our strength, our courage, our wisdom, our love, and our hope.