

Children of the Resurrection

Based on *We need to talk about death* by Lori Erickson (CCAUG28/19)

Luke 20:27-38 by Patty Friesen (Nov. 24/19)

This spring I went to a conference on death at Canadian Mennonite University because I thought I should learn more about death and funerals. I shouldn't have done that because I've had to preside over seven funerals since then. It's not as if it is a big secret that we're all going to die. It's just that for many of us, most of the time, it seems like an event that is going to happen to someone else or some hypothetical me far in the future.

I'd like to talk about death a little more before funerals. I don't really talk about death *at* funerals because I'm so busy trying to find meaning in the deceased's *life*. And that focus on life is fitting and comforting for families and friends. But often on my days off I'm left pondering their deaths. My close proximity with death as a chaplain in long-term care and emergency rooms doesn't make me feel depressed or morbid about death. I think the more familiar we become with death by talking about it, and understanding it and talking about it with our children, the more natural and less scary it becomes.

"To contemplate dying each day calls forth an instant reordering of priorities," writes Kathy Dowling Singh in *The Grace in Aging*. "Just like a quick and deliberate shake of a kaleidoscope, it creates a whole new patterning, a whole new view."

I've seen that shake of the kaleidoscope and new view happen for those who know they are going to die. The gift of knowing in advance that you are going to die is that you have time to tie up loose ends, say good-bye, and give thanks to God and to

loved ones. You can remove any embarrassing items from your dresser drawers. And whatever is weighing on your shoulders has the opportunity to be exorcized. This acceptance of death is what the very aged show us. As one elder said at the Mennonite Nursing Home - "We're all in the waiting room of death here - some of us are just closer to the door." Most of them were able to let go of pettiness and anxieties. Introverts started opening up and extroverts started listening better so that others could speak. Almost everyone became nicer knowing they were near the exit.

These experiences have made me rethink how I want to go. I used to think I'd like to die quickly - instant death by something falling from the sky and I'd never know what hit me. But now I'm thinking I might need some time to sort things out. The majority of us want to breathe our last at home, surrounded by those we love. Instead, two-thirds of us will die in health-care institutions, often after undergoing medical procedures that were performed because loved ones didn't know our wishes in advance. We receive some of the best health care taxpayer money can buy but we experience some of the worst deaths of unnecessary suffering due to end of life interventions.

My husband Patrick and I have seen enough of that to have our Do Not Resuscitate orders clear with each other and our parents. Patrick just wants to make sure there really is no hope of reviving him before I pull the plug! We've encouraged our parents to sign Do Not Resuscitate orders as well as Comfort Only orders and they have seen the wisdom of this so we as children know what their wishes are.

One elder I know whose husband passed away in their assisted living suite says she and her husband had talked about their deaths and that they didn't want

intervention so when her husband collapsed from congestive heart failure and the paramedics came – the wife told them - “don’t use the AED – the electric heart paddles. Don’t break his ribs. My husband always said, the day will come and it has.”

How do we get ready like this elder for the day of our death? For most of us, we fear not only our own deaths but also the effect our leaving will have on those we love. That’s the hardest to contemplate is that separation and loss but it may be harder for we the living than the dying. The dying get to a point where even the separation from loved ones can’t hold them here. Suddenly even the strongest bonds don’t seem to hold us any more. Nearing death, we go through a series of spiritual stages, which include letting go, relaxation, withdrawal, radiance, silence. Dying is holy ground as we return to the Holy One who created us. As Kathleen Singh summarizes: Dying is safe, you are safe. Your loved one is safe...Dying, remarkably, is a process of natural coming home. For those with a chronic illness, death often comes as a welcome release from suffering and an anticipated next step.

Our scripture today assures us that in death as in life, God is our God. Our Creator holds us in life and death and in life after death. We are all children of resurrection as the Gospel of Luke says.

This morning we remember our loved ones who have died in order of their deaths beginning with our beloved members and we will light 5 candles in their memory and then we all can come forward to light candles and say our loved ones names aloud in the microphone.

We begin with John Wall who passed away on Sunday, February 10 at Warman Special Care Home where he lived these past four years since his stroke. We remember John as a quiet, solid member who wore cowboy boots with a suit for church as he walked across the street to church from his home beside the Gathering Place. John may have appeared shy but he had a great sense of humour and love of life, and love of his beautiful Clydesdale horses there on his farm on Hwy 11 where his son Gordon and Heather live. John worked hard and was a brilliant horse and cattle breeder and liked to take them to shows – to animal shows that is - not to the movies. (John would have laughed at that joke.) John mourned his wife Edna's death for many years but found new joy in companionship with Irene who faithfully visited him in hospital and Warman Special Care Home. John had a solid faith that kept him going these last years since his stroke. He liked when we would come and sing in Low German and pray with him. We give thanks for John Wall, a child of resurrection. (candle)

We continue with Art Zacharias who passed away here at church on Sunday, February 17. Edna will share a tribute. We give thanks for Art Zac, a child of the resurrection. (candle)

John Reddekopp will give Deanna's tribute...We give thanks for Deanna, a child of the resurrection.

John Friesen passed away Tuesday, September 2 at his home at North Haven in Warman. John was one of our dairy farmers and then worked as a janitor at Osler School until he retired. John and Anne were long members here and attended until they moved to the city in 2000 and were no longer able to drive. They continued to create

community at their condo on Cree Crescent and enjoy family and sewing quilts. John and Anne sewed our OMC 90 quilt last year - the one with all the photos of Mennonite ministers on it. John was a gentle soul and we give thanks for him, a child of the resurrection. (candle)

Bill Braun passed away Sunday, September 22 at age 94. Bill was the last of our members who was alive when our church was started in 1928, even though he was four years old and sitting on his father's knee. He said he remembered the men sitting on one side and the women on the other side of church and he wasn't allowed to go back and forth between his parents. We miss Bill as a historian of our church's early years and of our agricultural community. He had a clear mind and enjoyed telling stories of the past and visiting and playing Cribbage. He and Marge were great hosts of many people - family and friends. Bill was here for our 90th anniversary and for Art's funeral. We give thanks for Bill, a child of the resurrection. (candle)

Now we may light candles for our loved ones and name their names if we like into the microphone.

Closing Prayer:

L: We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves.

C: Whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.

L: I am the resurrection and the life.

C: Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live; And everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

L; For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last will stand upon the earth.

C: And even after I have died, then in my flesh I shall see God.

L: Everlasting God, you are our refuge and strength, a helper close at hand, a shelter in time of need. Help us, O God to hear your words of comfort, so that by faith our fears might be dispelled, our loneliness eased, and our hope revived. May your Holy Spirit carry us through our sorrow into the comfort of your presence which endures for all eternity, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sung Benediction: In the Bulb There is a Flower #614 HWB

Spoken Benediction: God of resurrection who holds us in death and in life, be near to all who mourn and comfort us with memory and love and hope. Amen.