

People of University Lutheran Church,

Yesterday we moved my mother-in-law, Alice, into our home. Alice is 97 years old, battling both cancer and dementia, and receiving care from hospice. Her primary caregivers, however, are my wife, Margo, and her two sisters, Pauline and Marilyn. I am helping as much as I can, and as I joked yesterday, the best way I can help is to do as I am told. Whatever Margo, Pauline and Marilyn ask me to do, well, that is exactly what I am going to do, within reason. A special thanks to Brad Gunderson for using his truck to help me move Alice's furniture into storage. We both might be a little sore today!

As far as mothers-in-law go, I am pretty sure I won the lottery. She has only been respectful and loving to me. At one point early in our marriage, my wife made the comment, "My mom likes you more than she likes me." While this is not true, it goes a long way toward making my point, that I have never really understood mother-in-law jokes. She has been a blessing to me for the 35 plus years I have had the privilege of knowing her. Now toward the end of her journey here on earth, and in the midst of this coronavirus pandemic, I want to share something about her faith which might be helpful.

In her March 23rd devotion in the ULC Lenten Devotion Book, Alice made two comments about church and faith which I think are instructive. First, in talking about her childhood in Granite Falls, Minnesota, she said, "Being a believer in Jesus and active in our church was simply a part of life." Second, at the end of the devotion, in a summary statement, she said, "For most of my life, believing the Gospel and worshiping the Lord was more like breathing. I just did it." As I have reflected on these statements, I cannot help but be inspired by her nearly one century of faith in the Lord.

Indeed, Alice has been sustained by faith in the Lord for almost 100 years, and some of those years were really hard times. For example, faith in the Lord sustained her growing up as a child and teenager in the Great Depression. Faith in the Lord sustained her as she waited for her future husband, Orren, to safely return from World War II. Faith in the Lord sustained her through the death of her son, Joel, in 1979, as well as the death of her husband, Orren, in 2001. And, faith in the Lord sustained her through three bouts with cancer, the first when she was 78, and now the third at 97.

Some years ago, Alice spoke with me about how the Lord had sustained her through her son Joel's death. In reflecting on that time, she said, "I received a gift from God, perfect peace in the midst of the greatest hardship of my life. I discovered through Joel's death, the peace and serenity that faith in God can bring a person even in tragedy. It was a precious life lesson." Alice's testimony reminds me of these words from Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."

In other words, trusting in the Lord can sustain us through all of life, including life's greatest challenges. So, could it be that as Alice trusted the Lord to sustain her through almost a century of life, that we too might discover amidst this coronavirus pandemic the Lord will sustain us? Perhaps we might even see the Lord walking alongside us, holding our hand and leading us through these strange and difficult days. Well, I have a very good imagination, so in my mind I can see the Lord alongside you, holding your hand and sustaining you right now. Yet, as you believe it, it's not imaginary, but true!

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom