

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

This morning I had such a nice conversation with Bruce Bohlman. Recently, his wife and best friend, Eunice, moved from Maple View Memory Care to Valley Senior Living on 42<sup>nd</sup>. He was thrilled by the move, because he could see how the extra care in a skilled facility "is exactly what Eunice", as he calls her, needs at this point in her life. He said that when this whole coronavirus thing is over, he will very much enjoy spending time with her there, for however much longer the Lord gives them to be together. Then, he said something beautiful which made me smile, "Really, all of life is a gift."

What a statement at a time such as this. Right? Bruce didn't mean that Eunice losing her memory is a gift. He didn't mean that my mother-in-law, Alice, dying of cancer is a gift. He didn't mean that getting sick and perhaps dying with the coronavirus is a gift. He meant that life itself, all of it, the good and the bad, yes, even the dying process, is a gift. I have long said the holiest moment of every person's life is not birth or baptism, first communion or confirmation, marriage or even ordination, it is our time of death. It is that very moment when we leave this world, heaven bound, with Jesus.

However, I think Bruce meant more than going to heaven. Of course, Jesus leading us home to heaven after we die is a gift, but the good and the bad of life are a gift too. For example, the good times like our friendships and marriage, the birth of our children and grandchildren, happy times and holidays with our friends and family, are gifts. Yet, these good times are also no brainers. I mean, how easy is it for me to spend time with our granddaughter, Addison, and call that time a gift from God. It's totally easy, because she is such a happy and healthy, smiley and engaging little baby girl.

But what about the bad times in life? Are they really a gift too? Our culture tends to base its faith in God on whether or not we are rescued from bad things. We tend to see God present when people are healed from cancer and the coronavirus. We tend to see God present when life is smooth and going well for us. We tend to see God present when we have plenty of money and material items. And I am not saying God is not present in our lives and giving us gifts at such times. Rather, I am saying that God is also fully present with us in our lives even in our hard times, when things are going wrong.

I bet Bruce agrees with me. He sees time spent with Eunice even with her memory struggles as a gift. Similarly, I see time spent with Alice at Tufte Manor these past 5 years, as well as now at our home on hospice, as a gift. I experienced this even this morning when I kissed her forehead before I left for work. She laughed and smiled and asked me if I was home now. I told her that actually I was heading back to the church. I kissed her again, and she smiled again as she fell back into her deep sleep. That moment, as short as it was and as insignificant as it might seem, was yet one more gift from God to me.

In this time of the coronavirus, as strange and scary as it is, take time to appreciate what Bruce pointed out – that really, all of life is a gift. I challenge you to see God not just present when things are going well, but even more so when things are hard for you. It's easy to see God present at those times where he uses his might to rescue us from trouble. However, I believe God without fail embraces us when we are hurting and struggling in life. In those moments, even if we or someone we love is dying, we just might see God gives us his best gifts, when we are most vulnerable – even heaven and eternal life.

You are in my prayers,  
Pastor Tom