

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

As many of you know, my mother-in-law, Alice Rude, died this past Saturday. We were blessed to have her in our home for the last couple weeks of her life, with her three daughters and hospice providing truly excellent care. We had fun moments, like when our cat, Pepper, would jump onto her lap for a long nap as she sat in our recliner or laid on her bed. At first Alice would wince and be startled, but then she would laugh and relax, when she realized it was Pepper. We also had faith moments, as we shared prayer and favorite hymns, Scripture and Holy Communion with her, much to her delight.

After she died, besides being sad about losing one we loved so much and tired because sleep patterns had been interrupted, we felt mostly relieved for her. Alice did not suffer much pain but breathing became burdensome for her. At 97, we didn't want anything to be hard for her, and would have preferred she just quietly slipped away without struggle. In the end, we were all grateful to the Lord for taking Alice home where she is now beyond the reach of cancer and other life struggles, and her breath, eyesight, body, spirit and life are all forever new. As it says in Revelation 21:5, "See, I am making all things new!"

Now, due to restrictions thanks to the coronavirus, we must quietly bury this dear soul. I feel bad about this simply because faith in the Lord and involvement in the church were central to her life. It would be nice to commend her to the Lord with a little more fanfare. However, Alice, is probably very happy not to cause anyone too much trouble. So, just a few of us will share some Scripture, pray, sing, reflect on her life, and say our goodbyes at the graveside, where her body will be laid to rest right next to her beloved husband, Orren, who died nineteen years ago, just before September 11th, 2001.

Margo and I shared a holy moment with Alice the Thursday before she died. At this point, she was mostly sleeping, but would occasionally awaken. That evening, she was saying words we couldn't understand and seemed a little upset. We asked her, "Alice, what's the matter?" and very clearly she said, "I see a door and I need the key to open it." So, I opened my Bible to Matthew 7:7 where it says, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." She listened carefully as I read this, said a prayer, and told her she only had to knock, and Jesus would let her inside.

How amazing a woman blind due to macular degeneration, could with eyes of faith see so clearly such a door. Some may cast doubts on what Alice experienced there, but certainly the three of us were seeing the same thing. We were seeing that heaven and the Lord Jesus Christ were very close. It would still be about 36 hours before Alice would walk through that door and into God's heavenly home, but in that most holy moment the imminence of her journey there was palpable. We knew this special moment was over when Alice turned to us, smiled and said, "Thank you", before she trailed off to sleep.

My friend Luther Frette texted me today that his dad died on Good Friday 1991, and said celebrating Easter that year was exhilarating. I truly appreciate Luther's words and, in my heart, know that Easter will be a special day for us this year as well. After all, only one week after Alice walked through the door which leads to eternal life, only to be welcomed by the risen Lord Jesus Christ, we will be celebrating the Lord's resurrection. We will proclaim, "He is risen!", and rejoice in the truth that because of God's grace, Alice is alive and with Jesus, where, as it says in Revelation 21:4, "Death will be no more."

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom