

Dear People of University Lutheran Church,

If you would ask Charlie Murphy, "How are you?", he would answer with a predictable, "Phenomenal!" Although, it would sound more like, PHEEnomenal, if you know what I mean. Of course, sometimes he would use other words like "Fabulous" or "Outstanding", but my very favorite was always, "Phenomenal". I did a quick search on what this word means, and the dictionary definition says, "very remarkable" and "extraordinary". Now, the word "extraordinary" is one of my favorite words. So, as I understand it, if Charlie felt phenomenal, then he felt extraordinary, meaning he felt, "out of this world".

I will come back to "out of this world" later, but first let me confess that I once asked Charlie how he could always feel so good. I said, "Charlie, do you always feel phenomenal?" He took me aside and said, "Well, no, I don't. But, even if I feel tired or down, I feel it is my duty to help others be happy." So, in other words, Charlie used his positive, happy self, even if he was not feeling positive or happy, to lift other people's spirits. Isn't that amazing? At some point, Charlie decided, that he would use his words, his demeanor, and his attitude, to help other people feel better about their day.

This by itself is phenomenal. Strangely enough, when I was in high school, I did something similar. I was a cashier at Target, and you know how long lines can be there, especially on Saturday and Sunday. Sometimes people would be overly stressed or even angry about the wait and the long lines. So, early on I decided it was my goal to make them smile. Why I did this, I have no idea. Perhaps the idea was a gift from God. The thing is, I was good at it, and it worked. My manager even noticed, asked me about it, and at one point I received an employee reward, a bonus, as a result of it.

That's why when Charlie worked at Target a few years back, I would always go through his line, whether it was long or not. I watched him as he without thinking did the same thing, only way better than I ever did it. Charlie was making people smile, laugh, and feel good while checking out their goods at Target, just like he did at church. He was making people, including me, feel better about their day. Again, that all by itself is phenomenal. But does that make Charlie a saint? No! In fact, if you ask Helen, he was a regular guy at home, sometimes happy, sometimes grouchy, not always phenomenal.

Why am I saying this? Of course, first and foremost, Charlie has died, and I feel sad. Like many of you, I will miss him. However, I have decided despite the tears, to try and do what he did for others. You should join me. Let's together spend our days, even when we feel sad or blue, to use our words, our demeanor, and our attitudes, to lift people's spirits, to help them feel better about their day, and to make them smile. I don't mean we should be fakey or hide our true feelings, that wasn't Charlie's goal either. Instead, we are simply as Charlie did, trying to make others have just a little nicer day.

The Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 9, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Now, I know Paul is talking about money here, but what if we were to apply it to how we are together? What if we looked at every interaction we have with other people, as our way to from the heart, without reluctance or compulsion, cheerfully give ourselves to others, so they might feel happier and better just because they were in our presence? If we did, then we would be following Charlie's amazing example.

Now, I know we are going through a scary and difficult time with this coronavirus pandemic. Covid-19 has us feeling less than phenomenal. Even as the sun shines brighter and the temperatures get warmer, we are facing a truly hard time in our lives. Still, how we face this time is our choice. Right? We can feel defeated by this, or we can know in our hearts the Lord will save us, and that he will see us through this time. So, maybe with this good news in our hearts, and with the help and strength of the Lord, we can answer the question, "How are you?", as Charlie would. "We are phenomenal!"

Furthermore, if you could ask Charlie this very day, "How are you?", he would say the very same thing he has always said. This time, however, it would be true for certain. This time he would indeed be feeling

phenomenal, extraordinary, and out of this world, because in heaven he is in fact "out of this world". In heaven, he is living in the house and the home of God, where a place has been prepared for him, where his heart and life, body and spirit are new, and where he has begun to live what the Bible calls eternal life. "How are you, Charlie?" There is only one answer, "I am PHEENOMINAL!"

You are in my prayers,
Pastor Tom