

With Thanksgiving for the Life of
Lynne Schultz
23 February 1968 + 17 April 2017
Psalm23; Romans8:31-39; John14:1-6

Grace to you and peace from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

I bring, first, apologies: I had been eager to be with you for the visitation, but instead spent an hour driving the wrong way out of Madison for some reason.

From Madison, I also bring greetings from sisters and brothers of Advent Lutheran and Madison Christian Community, from many who have loved and prayed for Lynne, including my colleague, Pastor Sonja Ingebritsen.

Amid that congregation, I've been stunned recalling that it was just over a year ago that I met Lynne in the hospital, as her new pastor. Though I knew her less than most of you and journeyed through health struggles more briefly than you who had been part of the long, long haul, I've felt so connected to her. Some of that was her openness in sharing, including her knowledge, that she was proud to be her own advocate and could understand and explain these strange procedures she was having to face. Her gratitude for care and support—both from professionals and family and friends—also exemplified her personality.

Most notable, though, was almost certainly Lynne's exuberance and great big laugh. In the ups and downs of illness, they were great moments of relief when her laugh returned. In places of sickness, *she* was the infectious one. An unfortunate upside was that nurses, doctors, and more also came to love Lynne and delight in her and could enjoy being in her room for those few minutes.

Though she was stuck in hospital rooms so often and focused on her healing, she wasn't confined there. I got glimpses of Lynne's

vibrancy as she eagerly talked about connections with friends and what was going on in their lives, as well as current political frustrations and life on the other side of the world in Palestine and books she was reading and music and new ideas for spirituality groups and—boy!—did she like to talk about the garden at church and what was growing and how she wanted to be back getting her fingers dirty among friends.

That also leads to some of my larger point, not about church so specifically, but about what Lynne was yearning for and wanting and how that fit into the shape of her life, including right up to this moment now.

See, amid each setback that Lynne faced, or as she continued to strive forward with each medical possibility, in struggling to be well, Lynne thought about what the next steps would be. I came into the scene not too long before she got the LVAD heart pump, which was already far along in the discernment and decisions of the process. And from there it was dealing with bleeds and the thought of bypass to get her closer toward the transplant list and on and on. In all of this, Lynne realized what the next steps were, what it would take to proceed and get back to the life she wanted to have. Typically for somebody with Lynne's upbeat personality, we'd label this sort of focus on future possibilities as "optimism."

But I don't want to use that term for Lynne, because optimism tends to be a cheeriness with rose-colored glasses that ignores harder details. That wouldn't fit Lynne. What Lynne was was hopeful, which is also important to say for us here now.

The week after I met Lynne, I referenced her in my Good Friday sermon. She said her experiences gave her a deeper understanding of Holy Week, of Jesus on the cross, crying out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" That may seem the opposite of hopeful, but in

Lynne it wasn't. Even then, she was longing, knowing, and trusting that God's presence should and would be with her. Indeed, the forsaken feeling of God abandoning her directly paired with God's presence for her, with a sense of reassurance, that every word of prayer was heard and embraced and responded to by God. Her Good Friday feeling was at a cross-section with the joy and delight of Easter, that separation was not the end.

Hope means even amid our Good Friday moments we're not separated from God. That's why Lynne cherished receiving Jesus' presence in communion at those times. It's also in a song she shared not long ago, a gospel song by Iris Dement. It's a lovely, gentle song about Jesus confronting illness and suffering and need. The refrain goes like this: "*Well he reached down, he reached down. He got right there on the ground. He reached down, he reached down And he touched the pain.*"

That pairs well with an old hymn Lynne kept around on songsheets after a visit from Pastor Sonja. This one you might know to join in: "*What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry ev'rything to God in prayer! Oh, what peace we often forfeit; oh, what needless pain we bear—all because we do not carry ev'rything to God in prayer.*" That's not wishy-washy optimism that things are turning out hunky-dory. It knows there are pains and panics, that we bear grief and our sin. But God reached down and Jesus bears it with us and for us.

So the word of hope isn't that things get easier, but that God will bring us through it. That pairs with our Bible readings, that neither hardship nor distress nor death separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. That is hope. As in the 23rd Psalm, God's presence is with us in pleasant and refreshing times of abundant contentment, but also in valleys, when it's so

dark we can't see a glimmer of light and feel so utterly alone. Even there, the Good Shepherd abides with you, bringing you through that to dwell in his house forever.

That word of being brought out of death to Easter life could certainly be sufficient today. You walked with Lynne deep in darkness through Holy Week last week, had to confront death you should not have had to, the cross, the suffering and loss in the story of Jesus and also in your reality with her. And beyond that, she leads you in hope into the promise of new life, of resurrection, of being reunited at a feast into the grand heavenly chorus.

But I want to conclude in offering one more scriptural metaphor that Lynne had been clinging to in these last months: that of wandering in the wilderness. Like when God's people were led out of slavery in Egypt and spent 40 years unsure when—or maybe whether—they would arrive at the Promised Land, with delays and doubts and yet also constant miracles and the practice of caring community around them. That was Lynne's metaphor. Again, this is not of optimism but of hope. As she was encouraging patience and persistence in the long journey for those around her, she began also to grow frustrated at how she wasn't making steps forward, at least not in the way she'd originally been planning, for life to work out how she wanted. But she *did* expect to be led out of the wilderness and into God's promise. It's just that in recent months she became aware that that path might lead through death and into new life. That wilderness waiting is a terrible place to be, but now we gather together rejoicing in the promise for Lynne, clinging to it yet more dearly for ourselves. Even when our steps are unclear or troubled, we have hope in God's love that there is a way to life: Alleluia! Christ is risen!