

The LORD is My Light and My Salvation

In the name of Jesus Christ the Light of the world, dearly beloved of Ellie Schmeckpeper:

When we pause to celebrate the life of a loved one like Ellie, memories come flooding back. For me it's many home visits with Norm and Ellie, those times when they couldn't come personally to God's house. They joined New Life in 2008, but Ellie broke her arm in 2009. Toward the end of 2011, my records show that Norm began to have health issues. One of the joys of visiting them on hospitals and rehab. was their constant cheerfulness, plus the pleasure of meeting so many family members. Usually a devotion for Norm or Ellie, meant others too were hearing about the Lord's great love for us all.

Home visits were highlighted with stories. Norm's military service during the Second World War. Ellie's joy at his homecoming. How did they meet? Seems that a fine young woman moved to town. Norm's grandfather told him, "She's a keeper." Norm didn't need to be told twice, neither did the rest of us who knew Ellie. Coffee and homemade treats were as much a joy for her to share as for visitors receiving. Remember those old stories from our culture of a certain Christmas gift passed around from year-to-year? Ellie's only lasted a day or two at our house. Fruitcake even last year!

And yet the sweetest memory for me was the way Ellie's eyes would light up when I mentioned a favorite Psalm. In our devotions it seemed as if each favorite Psalm of mine was already marked in Ellie's Bible. And maybe even on a CD in some musical setting. This one for sure:

“The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid? When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh, when my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble and fall. Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then will I be confident.” (Psalm 27:1–3 NIV84)

At first this may seem like a strange funeral text. Who could be an enemy of someone as sweet as Ellie? The dear Holy Spirit pulled back the curtain on our spiritual battle when He inspired the Lord's Apostle Paul to write: ***“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”*** (Ephesians 6:12–17 NIV84)

The God of grace and mercy sent His only begotten Son on a rescue mission for which Jesus volunteered. Jesus the Light of the world shines on your heart through this Good News of sins fully and freely forgiven by God. As for so many of us, that saving Name with all its blessings was first poured out on her in the Word-powered water of Baptism, the Holy Spirit's washing of rebirth and renewal. ***“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.”*** (Titus 3:4–7 NIV84)

Through Sunday School, family devotions and personal reading, Ellie as God's own child was constantly gearing up for spiritual combat. By God's grace she kept winning day by day, for God in Christ can never forsake His own. Through thick and thin, sunshine and shadow, on high mountaintop

experiences or in the valley of the shadow of death, **The LORD is My Light and My Salvation – whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?** Armed for battle against the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh, God’s people triumph even in isolation of pandemic.

One of my favorite memories of Ellie will always be Sunday, February 16, 2020, just before COVID hit. Ellie was beaming that morning because she was in God’s house again. Usually it was rides from Bill and Marie Bunde and other caring members who brought Ellie to church. She was one example I pointed out to 7th and 8th grade Catechism classes for joy in worship and sadness when a child of God can’t be in church for worship. But on that Sunday in February, Ellie was brighter than usual. Dawn and Ed were in town to bring her to Holy Communion. **“Take eat. This is my body given for you.” “Take drink. This is my blood of the New Covenant, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** All God’s children who know and trust God’s Word in that Holy Supper understand how intimately Jesus is with us there. The Good Shepherd used that last Communion in God’s house to strengthen Ellie for what lay ahead. Through special efforts of Chaplain Ann and Social Worker Sam, staff at Cerenity in White Bear Lake, I could once more share our Savior’s body and blood with Ellie.

Hope springs eternal even when visits with loved ones have to be through glass and by phone. As this body fails, the spirit blessed by the Holy Spirit still working in God’s powerful Word, keeps renewing hope. A dear nurse said she didn’t have a Bible. Ellie had an extra one to give as she encouraged Bible reading and fervent prayer. And later in a visit that same nurse made sure to tell Ellie she is reading and praying and going to church. **“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”** (Romans 10:13) God knows how many hearts Ellie warmed by witnessing hope in Christ.

“One thing I ask of the LORD, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.” Wherever God’s Word is working on human hearts, there is God’s temple, there His beauty, there is true joy and peace and hope. Bible passages memorized for Sunday School and Confirmation, reviewed again and again in adult life, become priceless treasures. When other helpers fail and comforts flee, our Lord who changes not is there to abide and bring comfort to your soul. In Christ, “It is well with my soul.”

The Psalmist David knew how desperately we need that comfort when sad memories attack of sins committed, good left undone, words too quick and prayers too few – all the ways we disappoint our God and hurt each other. Even on our best days we must all confess honestly and openly with the LORD’s prophet Isaiah: **“All our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”** (Isaiah 64:6) With the Lord’s Apostle Paul we cry out in fear and triumph: **“What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord.!”** (Romans 7:24f)

Wise advice for all: **“I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living. Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”** (Psalm 27:13f NIV84)

Isn’t that one of the hardest things for Christians of all ages? **“Wait for the LORD.”** His own good time came peacefully at least for Ellie. And suddenly she was one of those precious souls John saw in Revelation. **Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” I answered, “Sir, you know.” And he said, “These are they who [literally: are coming] out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, “they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”** (Revelation 7:13–17 NIV84)

Hour by hour the waiting is over for another soul redeemed by the blood of Christ and joined to God by faith in Him. Souls keep coming out of this **great tribulation**. Call on the name of the Lord by faith in Jesus. **The LORD is My Light and My Salvation – grace and peace to all! Amen.**

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