

Sue Cady and I were sitting at the office meeting table late yesterday afternoon folding bulletins. Knowing that we would want an opportunity to spend time together as a congregation remembering Beth, the order of worship for this morning was changed yesterday to incorporate some of the hymns and prayers she liked that would bring us solace as we mourn her death. As we were finishing folding the revised bulletins, I commented to Sue that the sermon I had written for this morning was no longer appropriate and I was headed home to write a new one. She looked at the bulletin and innocently commented, “Well, keep it short.” It’s a parishioner’s dream, isn’t it, telling the minister to keep it short, especially on a beautiful summer weekend. But I know that Sue’s comment had nothing to do with the time of year or the weather. She simply meant that in a service like this, there isn’t time for everything and her point is well taken.

The author of Ecclesiastes assures us not that there is time for everything but rather that there is a season for everything. As we weave our way through life, we are bound to encounter the myriad of experiences and feelings that are a part of being alive. And as much as we might want to deny it and avoid it, death is part of being alive. Our minds tell us that it’s natural and normal but our breaking hearts tell another story. When someone we love dearly dies it feels like part of us did too. Connie’s mom had been sick for months, her death was expected. But that doesn’t change the fact that she was Connie’s mom and no amount of preparation on Connie’s part can take away the sting and heartbreak that come from losing a parent. And most of us knew that Beth had cancer and was nearing the end of her life, and yet the news of her death was a shock and we don’t miss her any the less because her death wasn’t unexpected.

And I suppose it helps to know that we’re not alone. Ecclesiastes is from part of the Bible called Wisdom Literature. Proverbs and the Song of Solomon are also included in this category of Biblical scholarship. These books don’t include many references direct references to God, but they do reveal important truths *about* God. And a truth revealed in Ecclesiastes is that there is a time to mourn and a time to die and God is part of our mourning and dying, our heartbreak and suffering—just as surely as God is present in Christy’s miraculous healing and the other blessings we know in our lives. Sometimes we’re tempted to only attribute the good stuff in life to God and consider the rest of the stuff that happens an absence of God. But I don’t believe that, I believe that God is present in this sorrow, crying with us and mourning with us—accepting of our doubts and anger, understanding that silly religious platitudes like “It’s really a blessing” or “She or he”—for surely Beth’s death does not occur in a vacuum and even if you never met her you are reminded this morning of others who have died and when they did a well-meaning “He or she is in a better place” didn’t help a whole lot because you weren’t ready for the person you loved to no longer be in this place.

In a season of grief, the religious voices in our heads remind us of the eternal truths that these saccharine religious reminders point to and they can bring us some comfort and meaning. It brings us a sense of that peace that passes understanding to know that the folks we loved in this life are now wrapped in the eternal embrace of God’s love and reunified with the saints who have gone before. But again our hearts speak a different truth of sorrow, and grief, and perhaps even fear of our own deaths which are yet to come. This season, as with all of our seasons, is complex and rich and chaotic and has seemingly contradictory events—miraculous healings alongside painful deaths, deep appreciation for this community with whom we mourn even as we look around and realize that sometime in the future we’re going to feel this way again because

another one of our beloved friends here will die. The seasons of our lives will continue to change, but God's love for us and promises to us never do. For indeed, Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us, and Beth just moved in a little earlier than the rest of us. Hers is now a season of complete joy and utter peace. Thanks be to God for her life, for the lives of the others we love who have died, and for this season of our lives that we have to spend with each other, celebrating life, mourning loss, and glorifying God by loving, caring, and embracing life just as Beth did.

Visiting Hours	Monday, 2-9 PM	Pruit Livingston, Upton Street, Reed City
Funeral	Tuesday 3 PM	UMC Luther