

**Daily Devotions**  
**March 19 – March 25, 2023**  
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Our Redeemer Lutheran Church, Newberry, MI  
First Presbyterian Church, Newberry, MI  
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**Sunday, March 19, 2023**

**Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-2a (NRSV)**

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die;**

Cancer sucks. Yet, just like death and weddings, cancer often brings people together.

A little over a year ago, my #2 sister, Carol, was told that her cancer had metastasized. It had spread to other parts of her body.

We knew this was serious. Carol had already been through a lot. But *we* knew this was different. We – her sisters: #1-Connie, #3-Mickey, #4-Diann (cousin who grew up as a sister), #5-Me. Sisters.

We decided to spend as much time together as possible for whatever time Carol (or any of us) had.

The following month we had our first Sister's Gathering. I drove the farthest (390 miles), Mickey drove about 75 miles, and the rest lived within minutes of each other. It was a few days that will forever be etched in our memories.

We cried. We laughed. We cried some more. And we ate. We literally were planning our next meal as we were eating! We shared memories of growing up on the farm, of our parents and grandparents, and our sister, Mary Sue, who walked on when she was seven years old. We said *I love you* more times than what may ever have been said before.

And then our Gathering was over. We vowed to repeat this time together soon. Sisters. She wasn't going through this alone.

**Let us pray:** *Creator God, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We thank you for the gift of family. We pray for those near and far, and for the times that we can gather; in Jesus+ name, we pray. Amen.*

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**Monday, March 20, 2023**

**Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 (NRSV)**

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;**

Carol's cancer team told her chemotherapy would be the best treatment plan for her. She was told of all the possible side effects. We knew this wasn't going to be an easy road for her.

It was time for another Sister's Gathering.

Carol was always a plain Jane. A tomboy. She never wore makeup. She never wore earrings or flashy necklaces or bracelets. She never seemed too concerned with the wrinkles on her face (she was once mistaken to be our mother!). But Carol was going to lose all her hair. And that was devastating to her (as it would be for many of us).

We had talked with Carol about shopping for a wig. She wasn't ready for that. It wasn't a reality she wanted to face. We didn't pressure her. We understood. She knew we were there for her.

And then she was ready. We found a wonderful center where participants could go and just *be*. We didn't know appointments were necessary but the staff was ever so gracious in spending almost two hours with us. Therapeutic treatments, massages, Reiki, support groups, and so much more were offered. It was a bit overwhelming for Carol, so we left. She was done. Disappointed. She was prepared to look for a wig.

Searching for other options nearby, we found a shop in a strip mall filled with beautiful wigs. Assisted truly by an angel, Carol found the perfect wig! It was almost identical to her hairstyle and color. She tried it on and looked so beautiful! Whatever lay ahead of her, *she was gonna be stylin'!*

More laughs. More tears. More eating.

Sisters. She wasn't going through this alone.

**Let us pray:** *God of hope, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We pray for all who may be sick or suffering in body, mind, or spirit, especially those we name in our hearts, our minds, and with our voices...(please name your prayer concerns). We pray for family members, friends, and caregivers who provide comfort, love, and patience to their loved ones; in Jesus' name+, we pray. Amen.*

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**Tuesday, March 21, 2023**

**Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-5 (NRSV)**

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup>a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;**

Life continued. Easter. Mother's Day. Carol's 69<sup>th</sup> birthday. Memorial Day weekend. Yet, each celebration took on a different meaning.

It was time for another Sister's Gathering. I took along a variety of hats. None of them matched. When we met for dinner the first night, I had everyone choose a hat and wear it during the meal. Bright red, blue, striped bands, colorful, sun hat, floppy, silly. We coaxed our only surviving aunt to join in the shenanigans. She loved it! And so did the restaurant patrons.

Carol had kept all the family funeral books and some of the family archives. We spent time around Connie's table going through the box of items that Carol wanted to pass along. Funeral books from our paternal grandparents, dad, mom, and Mary Sue. It brought up so many memories of years gone by. No one wanted to take them but we weren't ready to throw them away. Most of the items came home with me. To be passed down. Sometime.

It was a more somber visit, but oh, so special. Sisters. She wasn't going through this alone.

**Let us pray:** *God of compassion, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We thank you for the gift of laughter and the time of silence; the silly things we do and the seriousness of life. We pray for the memories we make and those who help make those memories; in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

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**Wednesday, March 22, 2023**

**Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-6 (NRSV)**

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup>a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;**

**‘a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away;**

Summer was such a busy time for everyone. Looking back, well, we should have made more time to be together.

Carol and her entire family (her husband, grown children, and grandchildren) spent a wonderful vacation together. It was everything she had ever dreamed of. She came home exhausted. But happy.

We kept in touch via Zoom and a lot more video chatting. I am so thankful for the technology that allowed us to remain connected. Yet, it's not the same as being in person. Sisters. Together.

Carol had a serious health scare. More serious than cancer? Yes, at that time. She went to the emergency room and was then transferred to a larger hospital. She was bleeding internally and needed surgery immediately. The doctor told the family Carol had a 5% chance of survival. Please God, not this soon. We're not ready.

Video chatting with my other sisters should have been called video sobbing. So many people were praying for my sister.

The doctor called her a miracle. She eventually was released from the hospital and spent a couple of weeks at a rehabilitation center. She finally went home. Thank you, God! She was weak, though. And tired of being tired. But she made it.

A Sister's Gathering wasn't possible then. But each of us was able to spend some time with her.

Chemotherapy treatment wasn't an option anymore.

Sisters. She wasn't going through this alone.

**Let us pray:** *Creator Spirit, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We thank you for hearing our prayers and answering them according to Your Will. We thank you for the gift of healing and pray for continued strength to meet the days ahead; in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

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**Thursday, March 23, 2023**

**Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (NRSV)**

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; <sup>3</sup>a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; <sup>4</sup>a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; <sup>5</sup>a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; <sup>6</sup>a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; <sup>7</sup>a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; <sup>8</sup>a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.**

My calendar said we were supposed to go downstate to visit with the family for Thanksgiving. We didn't. Sickness made it impossible for a Sister's Gathering. It was safer for Carol that we not be around her. It was so difficult.

Carol was a Black Friday shopper! That girl would get up at 3 in the morning and be in line at the stores as soon as their doors opened. She and her husband would purchase many, many gifts and donate them to Associated Charities for those less fortunate. They had done this for years. But not this year. At least, not Carol. She couldn't go. She was weak and, besides, she couldn't risk getting sick. Still, her husband, daughter, and the exchange student from Italy (who was staying with the daughter) went shopping. A friend of her daughters went along to be *Carol's eyes and ears* via video chatting! Carol still wanted to participate. And she did!

And she wasn't going through this alone.

**Let us pray:** *God of love, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We thank you for the resources we have and the compassion to share them with others. Continue to instill in us the ability to be good stewards with the gifts you have given us; in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.*

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**Friday, March 24, 2023**

**Text: Ecclesiastes 3:1-2 (NRSV)**

**For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: <sup>2</sup>a time to be born, and a time to die;**

Some of us were able to get together between the holidays though it wasn't the same without all five sisters together. We all have families and life took us in different directions. But we still video-chatted.

Connie, Mickey, Diann, and I decided it was time for another Sister's Gathering. We knew Carol didn't have the energy to go out to eat anymore. We decided we would surprise her with a visit.

She didn't need to entertain us. We could spend time with her, cook or order food to be delivered, let her nap, and just visit when she felt up to it.

Carol ended up going to the emergency room again. New scans indicated that the cancer was spreading rapidly. The doctor said two to three months, at most. We knew this was a guess, but we were hopeful for that time.

The hospice nurse came the next day and said well, maybe two to three weeks. How does it change so quickly?

I planned to go down two days later. The night before my trip, my husband said he wasn't feeling well and needed to go to the emergency room. We went out to my car and it wouldn't start. Thankfully, we have two cars so I drove him to the hospital (after a series of tests that lasted until 2 in the morning, the prognosis was good; a medication change was needed).

In the meantime, I contacted my vehicle insurance's roadside service. They called me back at 4:30 am and said someone would be at our home at 6:30 am.

At 6:00 am, my brother-in-law called. My #2 sister, Carol, walked on. It was January 16, 2023. I sobbed.

A few minutes later, a gentleman came to start my car. He said the battery couldn't be the problem because the lights came on. He put a charger on it and it started right away. Ok, he admitted, he could have been wrong. I told him my sister just walked on and he held out his arms and said something about everyone needing a hug at times like these. And then he left. Or so I thought.

I was on the phone and heard a knock at the door. The gentleman was back. He told me that he attends a local Baptist church and sometimes he fills in for the pastor. He offered to fill in for me anytime. It was a nice gesture.

The urgency to go downstate was gone. My sister had walked on.

At 8:00 am I called the local dealership to see if they could check out my car to see why it wouldn't start. They inspected it. They couldn't find anything wrong with it.

My husband was ok. The car was fine. Was I not supposed to leave so early?

My husband and I spent the day packing, arranging care for our pets, and talking with family. I spent some time in the office to keep my mind occupied.

We drove downstate the next morning. Family had started to gather.

My sister's wake was on Thursday. The funeral reception line was long. So much family. So many friends and neighbors. She was so loved.

That evening, most of the family gathered back at the hotel where many of us stayed. The staff was so wonderful and accommodating.

Carol's funeral was on Friday. The church, just like the funeral home the night before, was packed with family and friends. A few people spoke. My brother-in-law sang. And we cried.

We went to the cemetery. It was a cold day. We left my sister there. It was so hard to walk away. I know she's not there, but it was still hard.

The luncheon and conversation back in the church basement were comforting. So many mourners stayed. It was a much lighter mood. Again, much of the family gathered back in the breakfast area of the hotel that evening. And, again, the staff was wonderful.

It was hard to leave the next morning; so many of us were exhausted. The 390-mile drive lay ahead. I was so thankful that the Bishop and the Assistant to the Bishop made arrangements for pastoral coverage at two of my churches on Sunday morning. I was exhausted.

It was so good to be with family and to know she didn't go through this alone.

**Let us pray:** *Creator God, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We come before you, exhausted, in pain and sorrow. Comfort our hearts with your love and compassion; in Jesus' + name, we pray. Amen.*

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**Saturday, March 25, 2023**

**Text: Psalm 23 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup> **The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.**

<sup>2</sup> **He makes me lie down in green pastures;  
he leads me beside still waters;**

<sup>3</sup> **he restores my soul.**

**He leads me in right paths  
for his name's sake.**

<sup>4</sup> **Even though I walk through the darkest valley,  
I fear no evil;  
for you are with me;**

**your rod and your staff—  
they comfort me.**

**<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
you anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.  
<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord  
my whole life long.**

It is Lent. Easter is still a couple of weeks away. Yet, I am anxious to hear the Easter story. I want, no, I *need* to hear of Mary Magdalene going to the tomb, finding it empty, and seeing the Risen Christ! I *need* to sing *Jesus Christ is Risen Today*! I want to be reminded that, someday, I will see my #2 sister, Carol, again!

As I've shared so many times at funerals, "*As long as a person's name is spoken, they shall never be forgotten.*" I miss my sister, Carol. She didn't go through this alone.

Carol would have turned 70 this year. We are planning a Sister's Gathering and a family gathering. It won't be the same. We know. But she will be there with us in spirit. And we aren't going through this alone.

**Let us pray:** *God of love, we thank you for the blessings of this day. We thank you for the sacrifice of your only Son, Jesus Christ. As we prepare our hearts for his resurrection, be with us as we continue our Lenten journey; in Jesus'+ name, we pray. Amen.*

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