

What is life without your mother? For Elaine and Ginny, Steven and Elizabeth Sarah was grandmother, providing a kaleidoscope of memories, dreams and relations. For Helen she was 1st cousin and the only other family member in her generation. For some of you she was aunt or friend, for all or most all of your life. Why is it important? Because life will never be the same. Forgiveness is easier around a death. Love is easier. Knowledge that our family is our greatest human treasure becomes more clear.

Death was not a fearful spectre this time. Ninety is a mature number of years for a life. And life was lived, joyfully and with hope. But death is a powerful shaper of life, nonetheless. And perhaps in that is death's greatest significance—that it has the power to shape life.

Death limits life, and because of that limit gives life a sense of urgency. Does my life have meaning? How is that question affected by Sarah's life? Every thoughtful person is asking the question of meaning. Carl Sandburg wrote a succinct little poem about death and meaning entitled **“Limited”**

I am riding on a limited express, one of the crack
trains of the nation.

Hurting across the prairie into blue

haze and dark air go fifteen all-steel
coaches holding a thousand people.

(All the coaches shall be scrap and rust and all the
men and women laughing in the diners and
sleepers shall pass to ashes.)

I ask a man in the smoker where he is going and
he answers: “Omaha.”

On most days, we too might answer something as insignificant as Omaha, but today the question is sharpened, focused and requires a more thoughtful response. What is it all about? With John Donne, we know that the bell tolls for us as well as for Sarah.

In our lesson from Isaiah, the author states, “The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me because the LORD has anointed me, sent me to bring good news, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to captives, to comfort all who mourn, to give them garlands instead of ashes, oil of gladness instead of mourners' tears. They shall be called Trees of Righteousness, planted by the LORD for his glory” The key here, is “trees of the righteousness.” Whew, that is a tough one for most if not all of us. “Righteousness!” We do not think of ourselves as righteous. But for these, says the author “they are planted”. With the author of Wisdom he we might say

their hope is full of immortality.” And the author writes on, “Those who trust in him will understand truth, and the faithful will abide with him in love, because grace and mercy are upon his holy ones, and he watches over his elect.”

Many of us treasure the passage written by Paul about the strength of Christ’s love. Who shall separate us from that love? It is from that love that our righteousness comes, not from ourselves, our poor halting, inconsistent selves. Says Paul, “I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If Sarah could live in hope, perhaps we too can use this celebration of her life, her love, her faith, her hope as a way to light our own life for a little.

Sarah is gone. And her death reminds us of our own. But we give too much energy to it when we fear it. Death is not the mountain; life is. Death we can do little about. It comes when it comes and has its way in a moment. It is life that occupies our years and is responsive to our decisions. Our death is beyond us. We may live a wonderful life, and die a horrible death. Think

of the deaths we have witnessed in Maryland at the newspaper office on Thursday. The critical day is not the very one of our death, but the whole course of our life. It is to this life that the pointer toward God and Jesus and righteousness is aimed.

In John's Gospel we heard the man Jesus respond to Thomas' question about where he was going with the assurance that his destination was, not Omaha, but the very presence of God. He assured them as well that he was the way, the truth and the life. And the end of it? God.

How circumscribed, how narrow, our view of life. Particularly in the twenty first century, we are bereft of vision, of hope, of a great horizon. The courts have decreed that life does not begin until birth. The medical profession tells us that it ends with the cessation of brain function,. And yet, judge and physician, journeyman and president are all thought of before they arrive, and cared for after they are gone. Few persons there are who are discarded without a thought. We may be atheist, but wondering. Wondering if maybe Paul and John and Jesus were not right. Wondering if maybe there is not a God who knew us before we were a twinkle in our parents eye and who loves us still after the twinkles have been

replaced by tears. As Christians it is our conviction that Paul and John and Jesus knew of which they spoke. Sarah is one who is loved by Christ. That is the meaning of her life. And so are you, to Omaha and far beyond.