

Wednesday, September 2, 2020

When all is said and done

- Pastor Hank French

And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent (John 17:3).

In a sermon last spring, I told the autobiographical account of an unexpected afternoon in the life of a woman of faith who lived in Portland, Oregon. In this time of pandemic anxiety, it seems good to tell the story again.

She was in her late 40's, fairly young, and had been noticing a weakness in her muscles. It worried her and she visited her doctor who gave her a battery of diagnostic tests.

Several days later when the test results were in, her doctor asked her to come to his office for a consultation. It was only a few miles from her home, and she took the bus.

In the quiet of the doctor's office, she learned that she had contracted ALS. ALS is a chronic, progressive disease marked by the gradual degeneration of the nerve cells in the central nervous system that control voluntary muscle movement. The disorder causes muscle weakness and atrophy, and almost always results in death.

The woman left her doctor's office, sobered and subdued at this unwanted news. She stepped outside the clinic into a summer day, she felt the warmth of the late afternoon sun on her face. Life had never felt more precious. Strangely, she had never felt more alive.

She decided that, rather than ride the bus, she would walk home. She needed time to herself and was in no hurry to tell her family what was happening to her. As she walked, she looked around her and saw the mountains that crowd in upon the city, and she said aloud, "O mountain, I will be alive and with God when you have been lowered into the plain."

Walking on a bit farther, she saw the Willamette River running through the center of her town to join the mighty Columbia, and with great conviction she said, "O river, I will be alive and with God when you have stopped flowing to the sea."

And as she finally approached her home, darkness descended, and the first stars of the night spread out before her against the blackening sky, and she said, "O stars, I will be alive and with God when you have fallen in the last moments of this universe."

Where others might have felt small, frightened, and alone, she felt the eternity of the life within her and, with it, the sure, eternal presence of the God who had given her life and who loved her.

She would have had no such experience if she did not know God through knowing Jesus. In these troubling times, I pray for such an experience for all of you.

Prayer: O God, thanks for the assurance that, no matter what, all will finally be well. Amen.