

*Come Holy Spirit
Use me to Your glory*

Precious Pilgrim,

In your last letter, you learned of my husband's sudden unexpected death. He died of a heart attack. He was 62 years young. There were no symptoms, no signs, no warnings. He was fully alive - vital, vigorous - and then, in the middle of the night, I was awakened by four deep breaths and then he was gone. His father and uncle died in a similar manner. It was a holy death. We had 623 days of marriage bliss. All was gift. I never knew there could be such love. His love fleshed out a deeper understanding of our Lord's unconditional love.

During this season of grief, it's been five months now, I think the question is not why, but by God's grace, I think a better response is to say "yes" - "yes" to the pain, "yes" to the situation, "yes" to the circumstance. Duncan died. This is reality - a hard reality. Each one of us has hard realities that we have, we will, we must experience in life. It is part of our human broken condition. Our Lord is not a zapper - He is Our Comforter, our Savior, our Redeemer. I've thought much of Mary Magdalene, the Disciples, and Mother Mary over the last few months. They loved our Lord Jesus in the flesh. He was with some of them for a very short time - and then He was bodily gone. Their loss must have been exquisite. He was the Son of God, God incarnate with them in the flesh, and then He was gone. Ah, but we know the rest of the story, Pilgrim. He was

resurrected and now reigns with His Father God, but that fleshly loss was their painful reality.

Although our losses are not the same, they nevertheless are huge. Our Lord God is a compassionate God and that means all the world to me. He cares - He is comforting. He is loving. He is sustaining me during this season of grief and I know has done, will do the same for you, Pilgrim.

I don't know where to go with this letter's introduction. I don't know what to tell you of the last five months. It's been a hard, but good time. I will claim that word "good" because when we have such devastating times, we must be totally dependent, must totally rely on the Lord. It's only by His grace and His grace alone that we get out of the bed, eat, sleep, breathe, work, play, live, function - at least that has been my own experience. That total dependency reinforces my need, want, desire to be totally, completely the Lord's. That desire is always there - it's just that I'm afraid on some blue sky days, I find myself skipping along, trying, even if not intentionally to go it alone, or if not alone, at least try to be in charge. Lord, forgive. Whereas, when it comes and seems that all is lost - or some is lost or much is lost - we get down to the real "nitty-gritty" - the "real proof of the pudding" - all fluff is washed away, all false pride - all fringe benefits of this 21st Century material world - and what is left - what does stand - is love - our Lord God's love and there is no better expression of our Father God's eternal caring than in the cross of Jesus.

The word "good" used to really bother me in the name Good Friday, the day our Lord Jesus was crucified. I used to think how inappropriate, how distasteful - that the day our Lord Jesus was crucified for our sins, we would have the audacity to call that darkest of all dark days "good." But over time, I've had a change of heart. Only by God's grace can we have redemption through His Son Jesus' death. Only by God's grace can our sinful selves be sanctified through His Son Jesus' death. Dark becomes Light. The world is turned upside down, rearranged, changed - community through Christ's crucifixion is made possible once more with our Father God. Through that one act - Christ's crucifixion - we once more can be in Holy Communion with our Father God. God's Friday might have been an appropriate name for the day, for it was totally His Day - but even more so, our Lord Jesus Christ's act of saying yes to the cross stretched that word out. God's Friday through grace became Good Friday.

Although, of course, not the same, this season of grief could be a very dark one - but I pray by God's grace it will also be stretched through His love into a "good" one - a good season.

Your letter for today was written right after Duncan's death. It is addressed to the people of Monteagle, Tennessee where we have a summer cottage and had spent the last 8 weeks together. Although not written specifically to or for you, Pilgrim, I do hope there will be some words of encouragement

to the Christian community as a whole. Comforting acts to the grieving can really flesh out the love of Jesus; at least, that was my experience. May I encourage you to do such acts.

Here's your letter. God bless.

Dearest Monteagle family,

Thank you! Thank you for your thoughtfulness and kindness, the love that you have showered over cottage #90 – Brithaven – this past week. It has been like a gentle summer's rain – steady and constant. A deep soaking shower that has profoundly ministered to me and my family's grief.

I have been changed and rearranged by the love of Duncan. My heart has been enlarged. He has left an indelible imprint eternally on me, and I think also on this place, Monteagle, that he so cherished. It was a place of beauty, balance, and healing for him, as it was and will continue to be for me.

We are all so blessed to have such a haven in our lives. May we continue to be good stewards of this jewel of a place where the Lord's Light does seem to shine a little brighter, especially on cloudy days.

Again, thank you. And when over the years you hear a provocative question asked after a lecture that causes your mind to stretch a little, think of Duncan. Or when you see a beautiful bird or go for a walk on the plateau, please think of Duncan. Or when you see a couple holding hands or better yet when you grab a loved one's hand, please think of Duncan and smile.

I'd like to leave you with three statements that were important to him. The words on our wedding announcement:

“He has brought me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me was love.”
Song of Solomon 2:4

A roadside sign we saw when driving across the country last year in Snowville, Idaho, population 150:

“Cherish the past.
Dream the future.
Live the present.”

And finally, words we adopted from two little girls who used them as their grace before meals. We said them at bedtime after our night prayers. They were Duncan's last words. They are:

“Grateful! Grateful!”

May they be mine. I am grateful for him and for you.

See you next season,

Lucy MacLeod