

Scripture Reading:

Our first scripture reading is Psalm 23. I am reading the entire chapter from the Voice translation:

1 The Lord is my shepherd; The Lord cares for me always.

2 The Lord provides me rest in rich, green fields beside streams of refreshing water.

The Lord soothes my fears; 3 The Lord makes me whole again, steering me off worn, hard paths
to roads where truth and righteousness echo His name.

4 Even in the unending shadows of death's darkness, I am not overcome by fear.

Because You are with me in those dark moments,
near with Your protection and guidance, I am comforted.

5 You spread out a table before me, provisions in the midst of attack from my enemies;

You care for all my needs, anointing my head with soothing, fragrant oil,
Filling my cup again and again with Your grace.

6 Certainly Your faithful protection and loving provision will pursue me

where I go, always, everywhere. I will always be with the Lord, in Your house forever.

Scripture Reading: Our second scripture reading comes from 1 Corinthians chapter 13, verses 8-13.

Again, I am reading this scripture from the VOICE translation. 8 Love will never become obsolete.

Now as for the prophetic gifts, they will not last; unknown languages will become silent, and the gift of knowledge will no longer be needed. 9 Gifts of knowledge and prophecy are partial at best, at least for now, 10 but when the perfection and fullness of God's kingdom arrive, all the parts will end. 11 When I was a child, I spoke, thought, and reasoned in childlike ways as we all do. But when I became a man, I left my childish ways behind. 12 For now, we can only see a dim and blurry picture of things, as when we stare into polished metal. I realize that everything I know is only part of the big picture. But one day, when Jesus arrives, we will see clearly, face-to-face. In that day, I will fully know just as I

have been wholly known by God. 13 But now faith, hope, and love remain; these three virtues must characterize our lives. The greatest of these is love.

Message:

Opening prayer: Bountiful God, source of life; beyond knowledge and thought; mysterious and profound: we thank you because we have seen you in Sarah. We thank you for your life in her with all its risks and commitments, and for your love given and received by her among family and friends. We sorrow at her passing because we were enriched by her presence. Help us to grasp more firmly the hope that life is longer than our years and the love you have shown us in Christ that is stronger than death, through Jesus, our Lord, Amen.

Message: The last time that I saw Sarah, I sat down next to her at a square table in Oakview Terrace. After introducing myself as I usually did when I came to see her, she asked me if I was there to teach the Sunday School class. I said that I was not there to teach but to visit for a little while. She said that they weren't sure if they were going to have it since not many people had come. I told her that I would love to join them when or if the class got started.

It's difficult for me to fathom the 93 years of Sarah's life, especially when I have only gotten to know her in these last 16 months of ministry here at Hutterthal. So much has happened over the course of Sarah's long life, so I turned to her family for stories and memories, for perspective on a life, of which I had just barely begun to scratch the surface.

Sarah loved the 23rd psalm, and it fit her. The intimacy of this Psalm, of the relationship between the author and God reminds me of her singing as she walked or ran the fields or as she wandered out to the barn on an early morning to gather the cows into the barn for milking. God was as near as the ears of corn that she was checking or the pods of beans that swayed in the prairie breeze.

God was as near as the warm milk that nourished her families' bodies and supported the family business.

The psalm begins with a metaphor: the Lord God is my shepherd. I was told of the shepherd that Sarah was to her little sisters. Ruby and Joann would often get into their older sister Mary's things, especially her make-up, and when Mary would catch them, she would chase them through the house, trying to punish them for their lack of respect and personal boundaries. Joann and Ruby would run and find Sarah, sheltering under her dress, clinging to her legs, while Mary tried to get through Sarah to them. Sarah always took the heat for their misdeeds at least with Mary. She didn't just look out for her younger sisters; she looked out for her Aunt Anna as well, taking her in when her mother was not able to care for her. Aunt Anna's severe arthritis took her ability to walk, but Joe and Julia welcomed her into their home where she cared for the youngest kids while the rest of the family was out doing farm chores. Each child grew close, especially Sarah, to Anna as she told them stories and taught them in early life. Sarah told me the most stories about Aunt Anna in our time together.

As God prepares the table for the Psalmist, so Sarah prepared tables and gatherings often throughout her life. She and Eli even had their own hosting home on a farm that they had bought. Because it was nice on the inside and sat empty most of the time, they used it to host bridal showers and other celebrations with large groups. Sarah loved to cook and bake, blessing her guests to full and overflowing as they enjoyed her many delicious offerings.

Sarah lived into the love of her savior, the closeness that she developed over the years, exemplified in the song that she sang: My God and I. She loved to hear the scriptures as we sat together, and she laughed at some of the short stories that I shared with her. Even so new in her life, she had prepared a place for me too at her table.

Her gentleness and kindness were augmented by an independence and commitment to God, to her family, and to the farm. She was most often the first out of the house, even after Eli passed away,

to start doing the chores that she still could. On the farm with Eli, she was an integral part of business decisions and sought out ways to continue to expand what she and her husband were building together. Even as her vision slowly was lost, she still found ways to compensate by using a reading machine and listening to audiobooks. Her ears became her eyes in some ways as she continued to play the piano and worship the God that had been walking this journey with her. Even with the few piano lessons that she had early in her life, she held onto the music, teaching herself and sharing it even with her neighbors at Oakview Terrace, something I was able to witness one afternoon in Oakview's cafeteria. I marveled as her hands slipped across the keys, hands that had experienced more than I could even know.

Finally, we find hope in the apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13. As Paul says in a figurative sense, so Sarah experienced in a literal way: especially in the last 20 years of her life, Sarah saw only a dim and blurry picture of things. Paul reminds us that even if our physical vision is clear and unhindered, our knowing is still only in part, that in some ways, each of us is just like Sarah was, only able to metaphorically see the world around us in fuzzy shapes and shadows, but in the hope of God's renewed universe, in the new life of God's renewed family, Sarah sees clearly again, and we will too.

Closing prayer:

Let us pray: Everlasting God, you are our refuge and strength, a helper close at hand, a shelter in time of need. Help us, O God, to hear your words of comfort, so that by faith our fears might be dispelled, our loneliness eased, and our hopes revived. May your Holy Spirit carry us through our sorrow into the comfort of your presence which endures for all eternity, in Jesus' name. Amen