

## FAREWELL, SLEEP LOOSE

### 2 CORINTHIANS 13:11-13

Finally, brothers and sisters, farewell. Put things in order, listen to my appeal, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Years ago, before curbside check in and tight airport security, the airport was a wonderful place to witness happy reunions and joyful goodbyes. Now days most people are picked up or dropped off quickly before the police write you a ticket.

The last time I saw my mother was 22 years ago at the airport in San Diego. She was worn down from a 4 and ½ year battle with ovarian cancer, so she was barely able to get out of the car to say good bye. When I told her to take care and that I'd see her later, she looked up at me and said straight forwardly that she was dying. It made for a long flight across the country. Three months later she was gone.

Good bye messages can stick with us for years. For children a bedtime ritual is another form of goodbye. In my house I would make the rounds, hugging and kissing my parents. They would both say "Good night, sleep tight, and don't let the bed bugs bite." The part about sleeping tight never made any sense, and I checked my bed for bugs but never found any, but the ritual did bring me some comfort.

When I was a kid sometimes I got to sleep next door at Timmy Ryan's house. The Ryan's were Catholic with kids crawling out of the woodwork. They attended Parochial school and couldn't play after church on Sunday. Timmy once showed me a Catholic comic book that said that good Catholic kids would go to heaven when they died, but the non Catholic kids would burn in hell. My mother assured me that just the opposite was true so that I would sleep better at night. Visions of Timmy in flames was not all that comforting.

At bedtime I remember going into Timmy's bedroom that he shared with 2 younger brothers, and there was a crucifix hanging above the bed. Mrs. Ryan had us all kneel down, and I learned a prayer that haunts me to this day: "Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep, but if I die before I wake I pray the Lord my soul to take." If I die? My soul to take? I didn't sleep well at the Ryan's, and it didn't help knowing Jesus was glaring down at me while hanging on the cross.

When my kids were born I made it a point to make a bedtime ritual that was comforting. We read them stories, tucked them in, kissed them good night, and threw in the proverbial "sleep tight." I learned later that the saying "sleep tight" probably refers to a time before the advent of the modern mattress when ropes were spread across the bed frame in a crisscross pattern to form a sleeping

platform. The ropes would sag with time and weight and had to be tightened periodically.

Susan Stiles, of Foley, Minnesota, has two little girls -- ages 6 and 4. As she tucks her daughters into bed each night, Susan recites a special mantra to them, "Remember, you are special to God. Remember how much we love you. Sleep loose."

"Sleep loose"? The Stiles recite this strange-sounding directive to their girls each night for a very important reason. They want their children to relax and let go to the love of God that surrounds each of them. They want their children to sleep loose in the security of that divine love. Too many children, too many adults, are sleeping "tight" instead -- tensed and ready to bolt and run at the slightest appearance of danger, the smallest indication of risk. It is hard to get a good night's rest when all of your muscles are stiff. "Sleeping tight" is an uncomfortable, unhappy way to go through life. But for those who know they are "special," that they are "loved," each bedtime brings the comfort and security of "sleeping loose."

In this morning's reading the Apostle Paul says farewell to the church he was ministering to in Corinth. He did not know if he would ever see them again. Paul had had a rocky relationship with some of the members of the church, but in his farewell he extends to them an olive branch of reconciliation.

The word "farewell" has deeper meaning than just "good bye". Farewell means rejoice, be happy, and have a good journey. We can rejoice, be happy, and have a good journey when we know that we are loved by God and that God is holding us in his arms. And we can be filled with peace when we let go of old hurts and grudges, and when we forgive others who did not live up to our expectations.

So my final words of advice, and hopefully words of comfort, are these: This is a wonderful church with much love for one another. Let the community know! Get the word out that we are welcome and affirming. Kids at the high school would be blown away if they knew there was a church where gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered youth are welcome.

Be open to new ideas as well as new people. Be willing to let go of things that no longer work, such as the committee structure. Come January meet together and develop a plan that will make the church more vital and sustainable. Contact the

conference and ask them for help in developing a new model for being church. Pay attention to the Holy Spirit to guide the leadership of the church.

Finally, welcome your new interim pastor when he or she comes. Love them unconditionally as you have loved me. Please don't shy away from the church until the called minister comes. You know as well as I do that the church is not all about the pastor. The church is the community of the faithful who gather to worship and serve God. Think of ministers as the donkey at the manger scene. The donkey brought Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem so that they could receive the Christ child. Ministers like myself are merely donkeys who can talk.

So I wish you a fond farewell. I love you, and God love you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you. Sleep loose. Amen.