

May God meet you in your sorrows and pain... May God provide you hope... And may the meditations of my heart speak to you through the mysterious workings of the Holy Spirit... For it is in God we find our comfort, our strength, and our hope... Amen.

It was a hot summer day. The sun was shining so bright that the rays bounced off the surface of Lake Wausau scattering into millions of tiny rays that then made their way bounding back into my eyes.

Because of the heat and little wind, the water was calm and I could just slightly feel the waves shifting beneath the floor of the pontoon boat.

The motor started and the smell of gas filled my nostrils, overpowering the sweet smell of summer.

My Aunt looked at me and my sister and asked excitedly, do you guys like ABBA? I was in elementary school, and had no clue who ABBA was.

My aunt laughed and popped in her ABBA CD. The first song came on, and my sister and I were instantly hooked.

Now it could have been the music, the pontoon ride, or the summer sun that made us fall in love with ABBA...

But I think, it was really my aunt, with all her excitement and energy that the music came alive, because my Aunt Nancy was always the life of the party and being around her was electrifying.

Fast forward now, to many years later... To the day the doctors told my parents that it was time for us to say goodbye and to take her off of life support....

I had so many emotions in hearing that news... And I know now that part of me was in shock, but it just so happened, in that state of shock, I had a strange idea... I just knew, I had to bring the party to her....

So, I grabbed my blue tooth speaker and drove to the hospital... And when we all got into the hospital room, I turned my speaker on and started playing ABBA.....

My aunt was pretty unresponsive, but the doctors told us that she could hear us, so I prayed for the music to transport her to those summer days so many years ago...

So that she could feel the sunlight, the energy, and the love that we all shared—both then and now.

My family and I were in the room when they took her off of life support and we were with her when she took her last breath...

Death had come to a woman who was far too young and it tore each one of us up inside...

Because death is never easy... Even when it means a loved one is no longer in pain...

Death is never easy...Even if someone lived a good and long life...

Death, is never easy...

And yet it is something that we all experience, and is all around us... Death as they say is a part of life.

But that does not make it any easier for you, when you lose a loved one...

When you lose someone who was your world and part of your heart.

And yet, the world continues on and society seems to demand from those of us who are living to simply continue on and figure things out, to work through the stages of grief and to remember our loved ones...

But that can be incredibly hard to do... Because how can you continue on with things when the person you lost was a part of your everything? A part of your day to day coming and goings...

And so, for all of you here tonight, I recognize your strength, your courage, and your struggle...

Because it is not easy to live into a life that is missing someone... To figure out your new "normal" and to get up every day knowing that you will not see that person today...

So, tonight I want to hold space for each of you... to allow yourself a chance to breathe and be...

To come as you are... Knowing that it is okay, however you are feeling...

Even if it is anger or sadness... Because you have the right to feel how you are feeling...

And to hold that space for you I invite you to take a few deep breaths. And as best as you can, to try and notice how you are feeling, without judgment...

And now hear these words..."Jesus said, come to me, all you who are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest..."

All that you are carrying is heavy... And some days, it can seem unbearable...

Losing a loved one can turn what used to be a joyful December into a month you wish would be over... A month you are just trying to get through...

But the month of December is such a sacred month...

In a world where the days have been getting shorter and shorter since June, the month of December holds the longest night of the year, the Winter's Solstice...

And then the days start to get a little bit longer, day by day...

Showing us that when you lose a loved one... day by day, you might be able to let in a little more light in...

And a few days after the Winter's Solstice, is something even more sacred...

Where we find the most silent and holiest of nights...

A night that's true meaning often gets lost in societies fluorescent lights and flashy signs...

Because this is the night where we encounter the true light, light that was birthed into Holy Darkness...

Showing us, that day by day, God can transform the darkness around you into something Holy...

Day by day, God is with you and ready to take on your burdens, your pain, and your suffering...

Day by day Christ walked this earth so that he could experience all of your burdens, pain, and mourning.

So that one day he could take on the greatest loss of all...death...

And we live... in the aftermath of it all.

We live in a new creation that witnessed both the mystery of the cross and Christ's resurrection...

We live in a world of the now and the not yet...

Where we hold in tension the realities of this world, the loss of loved ones, death, sickness, and disease...

And we hold that in tension with the promises of what is yet to come...

And through this tension, God is with us... Because God holds tension in God's very being...

For the Triune God experienced death, in the death of Christ. A moment forever embodied by God, and a moment forever transformed by God...

A moment that changed God forever...

Allowing God to know intimately how you feel... And to humbly say to you now, come to me all who are weary and I will give you rest...

Rest, that might not take the sting of your pain away instantly...

Rest, that might not immediately lessen your sadness...

But rest that is transforming, if you turn to God, day by day...

Because day by day, God is with you to bear your pain and sorrow...

Day by day God is right there for you, with an open embrace...

An embrace that is filled with the deepest love, the warmest hope, and the calmest peace...

An embrace that is extended not only for you, but an embrace that holds every single loved one you have lost.

Because God's embrace goes beyond time and space, beyond life and death, and encompasses all of creation from first to last breath, and into eternal rest... Amen