

# FORUM LETTER

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## The church must be steered



“As [Julianus Pomerinus] says: ‘If it is dangerous not to guide a ship skillfully amid the waves, how much more dangerous is it to abandon it in the storm, as it struggles with the swelling waves.’ Therefore, the Church, which like a great ship, sails over the sea of the world, and is buffeted by the many waves of temptation in this life, must not be abandoned, but steered. For examples in this connection we have the early Fathers Clement and Cornelius and several others in the city of Rome, Cyprian in Carthage, Athanasius in Alexandria, who under pagan emperors steered the ship of Christ, nay His beloved spouse, that is the Church, by teaching, and by struggling, and toiling and suffering even to the shedding of their blood. . . . Let us rouse up and exhort our brethren with the revered words of Saint Peter the apostle: ‘Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.’ . . . Gladly should I have abandoned the helm of the Church once taken up, had I been able to do so or could I have found examples, either from the Fathers or the Holy Scriptures, to approve such a course. Wherefore, my beloved brother, since all these things are so, and truth can be sorely tried but neither conquered nor deceived, let our wearied minds take refuge in Him, who says, through the mouth of Solomon: ‘Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.’ . . . Let us put our trust in Him, who hath put the burden upon us. What we cannot carry ourselves, let us carry through Him who is Omnipotent, and says: ‘For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.’” —St. Boniface, *Epistle xlii to Cuthbert, Archbishop of Canterbury* (trans. by Edward Kylie, 1911)

## On signs and wisdom



I love the texts for the Epiphany season of Year A. At least when (like this year) the season is long enough, we get a good bit of the Sermon on the Mount – always a preacher’s feast. And then there are all those texts from 1 Corinthians. I’m one who at least occasionally likes to preach from the first or second lesson. That’s partly because I’m now in my 13<sup>th</sup> trip around the 3-year lectionary track, and sometimes I’ve just gotten about all I can out of a given gospel text. But it’s also because I strongly believe that God’s Word should be preached in its entirety, and that means taking up texts from the Old Testament or the epistles, as well as the gospels.

One text I’ve hardly ever tackled, though, is 1 Corinthians 1.18-31. It

came up this year on January 30, and it's a tough text for an intellectual. It seems to denigrate human knowledge and wisdom. I sit in my book-lined study, and I wonder if Paul, were he to come back to life, would take one look at all those books and snarl, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise."

### Wrongly approaching God

I do not think, however, that Paul takes aim only at intellectuals. Indeed, I believe that Paul was addressing some human tendencies which are rampant in the 21st century. The key comes in verse 22: "For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom." Here, couched in language about first century Jews and Greeks, Paul has told us something about ourselves, and about how we wrongly approach God.

"Jews demand signs." When Paul speaks of signs, he is thinking of what we might call miracles, concrete evidence that can be seen with the eyes. Occasionally people in the gospels ask Jesus to give them a sign that he is the Messiah. Often it is the Pharisees who ask for a sign, or the crowds. Sometimes it is the disciples themselves. They all seem to want to believe in him, but they need some proof. It is as if they are all from Missouri (the state, not the synod) — "Show me!" they say.

This demand for a sign goes way back in Judaism. I suppose its roots might be seen in the story of Moses, who asks God, when he appears in the burning bush, what answer he might give to any who question his credentials as a spokesman for God. It is as if he wants some credential to be able to produce as proof that what he says is true.

### Turtles all the way down

Today perhaps we don't expect signs exactly in the same way; and yet so many people, even Christians, are eager to ask God for proof. This arises from something within us that requires us to see with our own eyes. Today educational theorists talk about different ways of learning. Some people learn more easily by hearing, others by seeing, others by touching, and so forth. When it comes to learning spiritual truths, many of us seem to need to see — at least conceptually.

The late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen had a lecture entitled, "On the Nature of the Universe." One night after delivering this address in a small

rural community, an elderly woman confronted him. "That was very interesting, Bishop," she said, "but you are completely wrong. The universe is not as you described it. Earth is not a little ball moving around the sun. Our world is just a crust of earth on the back of a huge turtle." The Archbishop gently replied, "That's an interesting theory, madam, but tell me: What is the turtle standing on?" The woman replied, "He is standing on the back of a larger turtle." "Well," said the Archbishop, "what is *that* turtle standing on?" "It's no use, Bishop," the woman snapped, "It's turtles all the way down!"

Some of us just seem to need to visualize turtles all the way down. We need to have something we can touch, even in our minds; we need something we can comprehend. This need makes itself known in many ways. For some, great miracles are required. Perhaps a loved one is seriously ill, and we virtually demand that God heal them. Maybe we don't always say it in just those terms, but it becomes a kind of hidden subtext. If God is real, then he must . . . do this, or do that. We demand signs.

### Proving Genesis

Sometimes it has more to do with finding proof, physical proof, of things in the Bible. My wife's grandfather was Byron C. Nelson, a brilliant man, trained in science as well as theology, who is today considered one of the intellectual forerunners of the "creationist" movement. He devoted much of his life to presenting geological proof of his own understanding of Genesis. While I respect greatly the efforts he made, I've never quite understood why it was so important to him. For me, geology is very interesting, but it doesn't have much to do with the truth of Genesis. Yet he demanded signs. For him, if he couldn't scientifically prove it, he could no longer believe it.

I would like to have had the chance to ask him about this passage, for it seems to me to say that when we demand "proof," we've moved in a very troublesome direction. The book of Hebrews puts it so succinctly: "Faith is the conviction of things not seen." Faith, in other words, is a movement of the heart which *cannot* be based on physical, visible, tangible proof. At times God may give us wonderful signs to enrich and encourage our faith; but when we need the signs in order to have faith, then we really are in danger of giving up faith.

### Elusive wisdom

Then, Paul says, “the Greeks seek wisdom.” If the Jews, in Paul’s view, were looking for tangible, physical evidence, the Greeks were looking for something more elusive: they wanted to understand the ways of God. It’s a common tendency among us moderns. We are willing to believe, willing to trust, but we’d like to understand! It isn’t that we need to be convinced; it is rather that we want to make sense of what we believe, to make sense of God.

I run into this all the time in adult Bible study. Take up Job, and the question comes quickly: Why does God allow these terrible things to happen to him? And the final answer has to be, “We can’t know!” Or you can hit the wall on this again and again with Genesis. Why does God choose Jacob over Esau? Ask students what they think, and they’ll have lots of answers, lots of theories to explain it. I always end up trying, as gently as I can, to suggest that the real answer is, as Luther puts it: “I don’t know.” Or better, “I can’t know.” God’s ways are not my ways, and my thoughts are not God’s thoughts.

### Symbolizing mystery

Sister José Hobday was a Roman Catholic nun, and a Native American. She told about a wonderful gift her parents gave her when she was born, called the medicine bag—a symbol of what her parents most wanted to give her. Each parent had contributed two items. Her mother put in a handful of soil from the Texas hills where she was born, to symbolize the land from which she came. And she also saved a little piece of the young baby’s umbilical cord, dried it and crumbled it into the bag, a symbol of the life that her mother had transmitted to her.

Her father took a bird’s feather and burned it, adding the ashes to the bag. It symbolized, he told her, his hope that she would soar above all the difficulties and troubles of earth. And her father’s second gift, the final component of the bag? Well, he never would tell her. No matter how much she asked, he would not say what it was. She gradually came to realize that this gift, whatever it may have been, was the richest symbol of all: it meant that there were some things about the world and about life and about God that simply must remain a mystery.

That is the way it is with faith. Greeks seek wisdom, and so do we. If we could just understand God’s purpose, then we could whole-heartedly believe. But that is backwards. In God’s economy, you believe *first*, you trust *first*—and then, after a long time trusting, perhaps you begin to understand. Perhaps. No guarantees.

### The limits of my mind

That is one reason why the Sacrament of Holy Communion is so important to us. We cannot understand it. It is mystery! Oh, sometimes we try to reduce it to terms we can understand. Some Christians explain that the bread and wine are only symbols of Christ’s Body and Blood, there to remind us of the story. Lutherans have rightly been suspicious of that (or choose a stronger word), precisely because when we reduce things to symbols that can be explained, then *we* are in charge. Then *we* have the last word, and *we* can determine the meaning. But faith means accepting that we cannot understand everything. When we take the bread and wine, we receive Christ. “I don’t know how!” Luther confesses. “I just trust his words.” I love a line in Gracia Grindal’s translation of Samuel Rodigast’s *Was Gott tut*: “Your wondrous ways are not confined within the limits of my mind.” The Sacrament is a constant reminder that God’s ways are not our ways.

In the end, the key is in Paul’s words: “Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified . . . Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” Yes, that is it. In Christ, we see the very heart of God. We see that God loves us, that he forgives us, that he embraces us. That cannot be proved; that cannot even be understood. It is, you see, a question of relationship, of love. It is a question of the heart. How do you prove to your child that you love her? How do you understand the love your spouse has for you? No sign can do it, no philosophical argument can clinch it. It is one heart, touching another heart. It must simply be trusted.

And so with God. He reaches out to touch our hearts. Christ crucified, we preach—a stumbling block to those who demand proof, and foolishness to those who insist they must understand; but to us who are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God—and yes, Christ the love of God given freely to us.

—by Richard O. Johnson, editor

## When obedience means judgment

by Jeremy Loesch



As I live and grow older in the United States, and as I live and grow older in my Lutheran faith, I find myself re-examining things I thought I knew. One such re-examination is in the area of free speech, and where and how that speech is appropriately expressed.

I look at free speech through the lens of Luther's two kingdom theology. This idea of a civil realm and a religious realm is so helpful for our living. American Christians are allowed tremendous freedom because of the civil realm that exists by God's grace. And due to the religious realm that God has established, Christians are strengthened for life at school, in the workplace, and wherever they find themselves.

But what happens when the expression of free speech amounts to a word of judgment, or even condemnation? What happens when such a word challenges the civil law, or seems to condemn the rights under that law of other people? Is such a word of judgment out of bounds in a free society?

### Prayerful demonstration

In the middle of the 2010 election cycle my tiny state of Delaware became a major player because of the Senate race between Chris Coons and Christine O'Donnell. I was asked to take part in a prayer vigil and demonstration sponsored by Forty Days for Life outside of the Planned Parenthood Clinic in Wilmington. In the Delaware election abortion was not in itself a major issue. But Candidate O'Donnell was a professed Christian with a pro-life position. Some of her comments on the subject were tinged with religion, gratifying some voters and irritating others. After consultation with friends and church members, I made the decision to participate in the vigil.

I arrived early, and in fact was the first person there. (I should admit that the event started a half-hour later than I thought, but that's because I wasn't paying close enough attention.) Since it was a beautiful day and I didn't really want to sit in my car, I got started by myself. I had printed out a copy of the Litany, and I leaned up against a telephone pole and prayed it aloud (or at least I prayed it in a

voice that would have been audible if you were standing *this closet*).

Some other prayer demonstrators showed up at the correct time and they had brought signs: "Re-think Abortion," "Women Do Regret Abortion," "Men Regret Lost Fatherhood." I had made a sign that read "Abortion Hurts."

We mostly stood around, held our signs, and about every half-hour or so prayed aloud together. We passed out literature that listed alternative health care sites and clinics offering the same services as Planned Parenthood, but at a cheaper rate and without the encouragement of abortion. And we had some fliers produced by Delaware Right to Life available for those who were interested.

### Mr. Softee's view

Some people were interested in what we had to offer. Some people were not. Some people in cars that drove by would wave and give us a thumbs-up. Some people in cars that drove by used other digits on their hand to express their thoughts (including the driver of a Mister Softee ice cream truck!).

At one point there were six people praying, demonstrating, chatting amongst themselves, and talking with anyone who would listen. It being my first time at an event like this, I was advised that if there were only three or four demonstrators, no one from Planned Parenthood would come out. When there were five or six, I was told, we'd be joined and observed by workers from the clinic. True to form, it was when we got to six that employees of the clinic came outside and stood at their doorway.

### Obedience

I don't intend this article to be about abortion. Or about the mixed bag that is Planned Parenthood. Or about how no one approaches abortion lightly, with little thought. Or how the effects of abortion can be felt long after the initial procedure. This article is about obedience.

Was I being obedient to the laws of the land by my participation at the prayer vigil and the demonstration, by making my voice heard in the public square? Or was I, in some sense, being disobedi-

ent – or at least disrespectful – by pointing out the error of our society and highlighting the better way that exists? The answer is “yes.”

The laws of the United States allow for the abortion procedure to be performed. I clearly was showing my disrespect for and opposition to that established law of the left hand kingdom.

But one can also argue that the Law of God does not allow for the murder of the innocent. By being present at the prayer vigil, by holding signs, I was being obedient to the holy Law of God, the Law that has the good order and well-being of society in mind. The poor, the widowed, the orphaned, the “less than,” the least, the ignored and forgotten are all lifted up as objects of God’s mercy and are people for whom Christians are to care.

### **Making my views known**

As a citizen of the United States, it is my privilege and my right to make my views known, even if that entails a word of judgment against fellow-citizens who are acting in a way permitted by civil law. Simply following orders lemming-like is not in the best interest of our country.

And as a member of the Church of Christ, it is my obligation to make my views known, to share the Biblical perspective on a host of issues. This does not preclude listening to others, to hear what their perspective might be. Indeed, sharing perspectives with one another often leads to learning for both sides.

Our society, in fact, needs to hear and discuss conflicting ideas so that we can learn what is true and what is not. And we know that sometimes this works and sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes “disobedience” of unjust laws is in fact a form of obedience. That idea is by no means new; smarter, more articulate political thinkers than I – sometimes Christians, sometimes not – have expressed that thought for centuries. As a student of history, I’ve studied how people both inside the Church and outside of the Church have walked the sometimes fuzzy line between obedience and disobedience.

### **All you need is . . .**

I suppose in truth I was being neither obedient nor disobedient in what I did. I broke no laws, though my actions were no doubt offensive to some because they communicated that word of judgment.

And from my perspective I was loving my neighbor by standing on a public sidewalk, praying the Litany, the Lord’s Prayer, and confessing the Creed with a couple of other Lutherans from my congregation and some Roman Catholics from northern Delaware.

### **The power of Christ**

I did have the opportunity to obey the Lord more specifically by proclaiming the redemptive power of Christ to someone in need. In the course of the prayer demonstration, a man and woman were dropped off by the driver of a car. This couple went into the clinic after taking some of our literature on health care options. But the driver stayed in her car. After a time she got out and asked me, “Who *does* abortion hurt?” – the message on the sign I was holding.

I explained all the various people that are wounded through abortion and the woman revealed that she had an abortion in the very recent past. It was killing her spiritually and emotionally. I directed her to Rachel’s Vineyard, an agency that helps post-abortive women. But I also shared with her the love that covers all of our sin. She was a believer in Jesus and we discussed the great story of the prodigal son and how the prodigal never had the chance to say to his father what he had thought while sitting in the pigpen. She knew that story and she repeated the words of the son – “I am no longer worthy to be called your son.” And she seemed stuck at the thought of her unworthiness, her disregard for the plans of God. I took that opportunity to remind her of the story. It was the father who ran to the son. The father embraced the son. The son never had a chance to speak for the father declared that what was lost was found, that what was dead was now alive.

I also shared with her that all of us, as much as we desire to do what is right, fall short. We are by nature sinful and unclean. That sinful nature leads to all kinds of sinful behaviors. But Jesus Christ was given to die for us. We are sinners, but through the grace of God, we are redeemed sinners, strengthened to live our days under the mercy of God, strengthened to love our neighbors in thought, word, and deed. That was my witness to her that day, my obedient witness.

### The time of the three monkeys

I realize that I wasn't making a commotion that day, and, as I said, I broke no law other than perhaps that of decorum. Some of you who read this may have taken part in demonstrations in the past, sitting in a public place and being physically removed, marching down public streets with supporters on one side and detractors on the other. This was nothing like that. I did not stick one flower in the gun barrel of a National Guardsman.

But upon reflection, I do think I was pronouncing a judgment. I'd like to think that it was a judgment for life and for health more than a judgment against abortion and against women's (and men's) reproductive choice. But judgment it was.

It seems that doing such a thing is highly distasteful to the society in which we live. I've been told that the 70s were the "Me Decade," and the 80s saw the ascendancy of yuppies and DINKs ("dual income, no kids"). I haven't yet been informed what the 90s and 00s are going to be called, but my suggestion for these twenty years is the era of "Live and Let Live" or the "Time of the Three Monkeys" (see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil).

### The personally opposed gambit

A common phrase both inside and outside of the Christian church is this, with several variations: "I'm personally opposed to abortion but I would never tell someone to not have one." (And of course you could insert several different issues there in place of abortion.) When you ask someone why they would never tell someone to not have an abortion, the response is often, "I wouldn't feel comfortable" or "It's not my place to say anything" or especially "Who am I to judge someone else?"

Indeed, in both the secular and religious worlds, the notion of being non-judgmental is pervasive. You can understand why. It sounds vaguely like grace, a good theological concept. It helps everyone get along. And besides, being non-judgmental is pragmatic. We look for what gets the job done, and as long as what one person does works for him or her, consequences and ethics be damned!

Or, as someone once wrote, "everyone does what is right in their own eyes."

But . . .

But sometimes the Law must be spoken. Do

we not speak the Law so that it may do its preparatory work on the heart to receive the Gospel? Providing ministry rooted in a Law and Gospel understanding means that ministers will often find themselves outside the lines of what is accepted by the rest of society.

And so my personal comfort is irrelevant. It is my place to say something. I have been given the ability and responsibility to point to the eternal and just Judge who is coming swiftly and certainly.

I consider myself fortunate to be a citizen of the United States, and I regard it as a blessing that I was graciously made a member of Christ's church. Through prayer, devotion and tears I have learned that my own comfort finally depends upon the reality of God's mercy poured out through Jesus Christ. When I notice someone being put-upon, when the powerful trample the weak, when the loudest voices drown out the softer ones, when some people are devalued, disregarded, and discarded, then I may well find myself standing on the wall, in the supermarket aisle, or on a street corner giving a word of warning to people who want to hear it and who don't want to hear it. A great hymn by Martin Franzmann states it this way: "Preach you the Word and plant it home to men who like or like it not, the Word that shall endure and stand when flowers and men shall be forgot." [*Lutheran Service Book* #586]

### The truth about lies

My time on the sidewalk was not long. I'll go back and do it again, as Delaware Right to Life is there every Friday when abortions are being performed. I may be disrespecting the civil laws of the state and our country, and what they say about the "rights" of others. Some may find that implicit word of judgment offensive or uncharitable. But the truth of God's Word on this particular issue requires me to be obedient to the Word of truth, of hope, of mercy, kindness, forgiveness, and love.

I believe that God's Word reveals what is right and what is wrong. If I never say what is wrong, how can I tell anyone what is right? And if I never point out the lies of the Deceiver, how can I point to the truth of Christ?

*Jeremy Loesch lives with his wife and children in Elkton MD and serves Our Redeemer (LCMS) in Newark DE.*

## From the archives: The evidence of scripture and tradition



*Editor's note: This year Forum Letter celebrates 40 years of publication. The present editor is a historian, so an anniversary occasion like this drives him to the archives. During this anniversary year, we are regularly reprinting some brief tidbit from an earlier issue, something both of historical interest and contemporary applicability. This month's selection comes from the July 1976 issue, and it demonstrates at least a couple of things: We've been debating sexuality for a very long time, and then-editor Richard John Neuhaus wasn't always an accurate prognosticator.*

Three years ago it was thought in some circles almost certain that major church bodies would sooner or later change their formal position on homosexuality. The body that might do it sooner, it was expected, would be the United Methodists. Long before the General Conference met last May, however, proponents of change encountered enormous hostility and finally came in with a watered-down resolution that the Church "welcome into fellowship and membership people of varied sexual orientation," while at the same time maintaining its position that homosexual practice is "incompatible with Christian teaching." Even this compromised and obviously inconsistent proposal was decisively defeated. The premier Methodist theologian, Albert Outler, cautioned the assembly against "a further drift into decadence."

### A return to sanity and tradition

Many Christians will welcome what they view as a return to sanity and tradition in resistance to the vaunted sexual revolution. Perhaps they are right. It seems that "gay liberation" has reached its limit in changing the official moral judgment of major churches. At the same time, one hopes this does not represent a return to the bigotry, ignorance and sheer cruelty that has too often marked the churches' reaction to their homosexual members, both male and female. Christians — and most emphatically Lutherans — have hardly begun to develop patterns of understanding and sensitivity in ministering to and with homosexuals. Gay liberationists can now help in that process, but only if they are prepared to abandon the campaign to have homosexual practice declared a matter of moral indifference. Homosexual practice will continue to be viewed as a weakness, if not a sin, by the great majority of Christians. There is more than prejudice going for that view; the evidence of scripture and of tradition cannot be dismissed lightly. Our gay brothers and sisters should know that to be weak or a sinner in a community of understanding and forgiveness is not the worst possible fate. We all, heterosexual and homosexual alike, live under the same judgment and by the same grace.

## Omnium gatherum



**Calendar** • Regular readers will probably not be surprised to know that I'm a guy who likes calendars. I had an uncle who was so frugal that he would cut up the wall calendar at the end of the year and rearrange the weeks and days and months so that he could use it again the next year, which worked pretty well for him except during leap year. Me, though, I like a new calendar each year. I like it that some things stay the same, and some things don't. It's kind of like life in that way, you know. Anyway, I was more than a bit startled when I took out my Augsburg Fortress-produced offering envelope for January 2 and discovered that AF had decided that wasn't the Second

Sunday after Christmas, nor even the Commemoration of Johann Konrad Wilhelm Löhe. No, in Augsburg Fortress land, this year January 2 was Epiphany of our Lord. I know, I know, some churches, apparently already weary of Christ-mass hymns (having been singing them since Thanksgiving), have taken to putting the Magi on the fast track and celebrating the Sunday before January 6 as "Epiphany Sunday." I'm not a big fan of that, though I don't lose a lot of sleep over it. But however you slice it, January 2 is *not* Epiphany. Augsburg Fortress has a tendency to make up its own liturgical reality, I know. It's bad enough when they screw up things like bulletin covers — but offering envelopes?

This we cannot accept. I was so piqued that I left my offering home that day. (Don't worry, I made it up the next week.)

**Say what?** • I'm writing this during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. I thought it would be nice to include some statement of Presiding Bishop Hanson in my church bulletin for the Sunday of that week. But no, no statements, press releases, or "messages." I know it isn't as important as World AIDS Day, but just one year he could say *something*, don't you think? I mean, the Pope always does.

**Staying in the ELCA** • Somehow I missed this when it was first posted, but my attention was recently called to a reflection a year or more ago by David Yeago, professor at Lutheran Theological Southern Seminary, entitled "In the aftermath." Yeago gives a reasoned and thoughtful account of his own thinking, as a "traditionalist," about what it means to be in the ELCA. You can access it at <http://lutheranspersisting.wordpress.com/>.

**The long goodbye** • Some four years ago, I reflected in these pages about the death of my father-in-law, Richard W. Solberg. He had died quite suddenly at the age of 89—always a shock, no matter what one's age. Dad was an accomplished and well-respected pastor, professor, and historian in Lutheran circles. In December, his beloved wife, my mother-in-law June died. Her death was very different. She had already been suffering from Alzheimer's disease for some years prior to Dad's death, and when he died, she declined rapidly. Yet

she remained physically strong, even as her brain became unable to direct her body to do even simple tasks like feeding herself. Like most women of her generation, her vocation was primarily that of wife and mother. I do not mean that she just raised kids and kept the household running, although she did. But she was fully supportive and involved in every aspect of her husband's rather eclectic career—relief worker in postwar Germany, college professor and dean, denominational executive, parish pastor, writer and scholar; whatever Dad did, she was his infrastructure and his inspiration. She was a brilliant woman who, had she been born thirty years later, would no doubt have racked up a long list of professional accomplishments. But she found fulfillment and satisfaction in the background roles, the ones that are often as important as and more challenging than the limelight roles. When I notified her tax accountant that she had died, he immediately replied, "June always went out of her way to make me feel good about myself as a person; she was always special to me." He really nailed it; she could talk to anyone, and she would make them feel as if they were the most interesting and significant person in the world. As almost always with Alzheimer's, it was a very long goodbye. A few days before her death she was chuckling and making faces, her personality there again for an hour or two, even if she couldn't express it verbally. She died gently, surrounded by several of her children and their spouses, with Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* playing in the background. She led a good and faithful life, and now she is with Jesus. — roj

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