

# CHRISTMAS 2019

## PASTOR AND BARB STRACKBEIN

What is Christmas all about? God makes it very clear that there is nothing more important than becoming heirs of eternal life through faith in the salvation Jesus won for us.

“For at one time we ourselves were also foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by many kinds of evil desires and pleasures, living in malice and jealousy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior toward mankind appeared, he saved us – not by righteous works that we did ourselves, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth

and the renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs in keeping with the hope of eternal life.” Titus 3:3-7



A passage like this makes Christmas a very powerful and joyful event, especially when faced with strong reminders that life is short. Faith in Jesus as our Savior is the only way we can be assured of life forever with him. That in turn, makes the time we have left here, a very special time.

The big news for us here in Oklahoma City is that in October Barb's cancer doctor announced that her cancer, a non-Hodgkin lymphoma called Waldenstrom's Macroglobulinemia, has advanced and is now a stage four cancer with an average life expectancy of about one year. The time between blood transfusions have increased substantially and are now about every two weeks. She also needs plasma exchanges every month. Her white blood cell count is a little below 1. It seems like the

cancer has affected her heart leaving her very weak. She has been prescribed some heart medication to keep the heart beats per minute from going too high. We are prepared for whenever the Lord calls one of us home. Finally, the end of life is a time determined by God. When doctors discovered her cancer in February of 2006 the average life span with treatment according to MD Anderson and Cancer Treatment Center of America was five years. Barb declined the chemo and Rituxan remedies and after a lot of study, went a different route with massive doses of liquid vitamin C given intravenously every week for almost 14 years.

The vacations we took this year involved seeing family. Almost everyone made it to the Staats' family reunion for Barb's side of the family. It was held at her sister Laura's and brother-in-law Mike Metcalf's home on a lake in Northern Wisconsin. We also made a point to see Barb's mom in Eau Claire, WI; Pastor's mom in Winthrop, MN.; our oldest son Ben and his wife and five children in New Ulm, MN; our youngest son and his wife Amy along with their three children in Milwaukee, WI. We made several shorter trips to see our third son Peter, his wife Rachel and three children in Eureka Springs, Arkansas. In

October we flew out to Vancouver, Washington to celebrate our 45<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Isaac, our second son, drove up from San Francisco to see us. His girlfriend, Desiree, also flew in. It was a treat. Last Christmas both Isaac and Daniel, our fourth son, flew in and spent a week and plan to do so again this Christmas. Daniel is now serving at a U.S. Air Force base in England. We also attended the annual LWMS (Lutheran Woman's Missionary Society)



convention in Des Moines, IA with several of the women of our church. It is always powerfully uplifting to hear the missionary stories and worship with so many WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) men and women. We met lots of former missionaries and had lots to talk about.

So what is in the time left to us here on earth? We don't know but are content to leave that in God's hands. He is good! He is love! That goodness and love surround us. As the Psalmist said in Psalm 23:4 &6

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil for thou art with me!! Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me... Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Amen!"