

## Chapter Fifteen, “Faith and Gratitude”

Of course, one of the things that’s made my griefs easier to bear, and has shaped and enriched my life, is my faith in God. I am one of those few people, I suppose, who always had a strong faith and never much in the way of doubt.

My parents didn’t talk about God a lot at home. They were both very devout, but I guess they didn’t feel they needed to talk about their faith very much. We would say prayers at meals and that sort of thing, and of course we went to church every Sunday and we were involved there. My mother made sure I was prepared for Sunday School, learned my catechism, that sort of thing. But I don’t think a personal relationship with God was part of their spiritual makeup. It was more rote. That was common in their generation. They were not expressive about it, but you knew it was important to them. Like with so many emotional things, they demonstrated through their lives and their actions how they felt and what was important to them, instead of talking about it.

I went to St. Peter’s Lutheran Church during my growing-up years. That was one of many small Lutheran churches in our community. I have a picture of it on my wall, a very traditional-looking church, old-fashioned, simple. In fact, it was so simple that it didn’t have restrooms, only outhouses. We’d try not to have to use them while we were there, but sometimes it couldn’t be helped!

St. Peter’s had a parish hall about a block away, with a big room and a stage. That’s where fellowship events would happen: Sunday School, the Ladies’ Aid, the Walther League, the men’s club that met once a month, the quilting group. I remember that after Sunday School was finished, the teachers and ushers would walk the little children down to the church to meet their parents, with the ushers acting as crossing guards.

In our church, we started Sunday School at age four. It was every Sunday, before church. During the church service, the children would sit up front, away from our parents, but Pastor could see us and keep an eye on us! My friend Eleanor and I would sit together and get bored, and try to find ways of doing things without being noticed, and I remember the pastor would sometimes say, “Hey there, settle down, now.”

Every Sunday, the children would put money in the offering plate. Girls usually didn’t have pockets in our dresses, but we all carried handkerchiefs, and we would have a little money for the Sunday School collection tied into the corner of a handkerchief.

All my mother's sisters went to St. Peter's too, so there were a lot of Drexlers. You weren't supposed to chat in the church sanctuary, but after church we would walk out onto the sidewalk, and there were always a lot of them out there talking. That made church special for me, too, being able to see my extended family and visit with them.

Besides our usual Sunday School classes, we children attended a summertime Sunday School series every morning for four to six weeks in the summers and also had what was called Saturday School every Saturday morning during the school year. Pastor was the teacher. There were a lot of different age levels, so I'm not sure how he managed that! Sunday School was where I made my first friends: Eleanor, Levina, Barbara Ann, and my cousin Jo Ann, who was a close friend and frequent playmate. We would learn Bible verses and the Catechism, and we would sing together. It was fun.

And of course we celebrated Christmas and Easter, both at church and at home, in special ways. When I was quite young, on the day before Easter, Kathy and I would always set up a "nest" of bricks on the front porch and line the nest with soft green moss we'd gathered. Then on Easter morning, the Easter Bunny would have left some eggs there, hardboiled and dyed in lovely colors! We gathered those eggs before we went to church, and then when we came home, lo and behold, there were even more eggs there! I even seem to recall that sometimes when we went visiting in the afternoon that day, there would be a repeat visit from the Easter Bunny. As I got older, I participated in the egg-dyeing and even reached the level of writing names on the eggs or using simple transfers. We never made our own dyes as some people did; we always bought egg dye packets from the store.

At Christmas, the most important thing to look forward to was the Sunday School children's program on Christmas Eve. We rehearsed on Sunday afternoons throughout December. The younger children were each given a short recitation to memorize and then stood in front of the congregation during the program to say it. After our recitation was done, we were supposed to take a bow. Mother coached me on all this before my first year in the program, when I was four. But when the time came, for some reason, I was willing to stand in front, but I refused to recite my piece. Pastor had to recite it instead, while I stood there silently. Still, when he was done, I took my bow! Poor Mother.

After the recitations, the children sang carols, and each child received a bag that contained candy and an orange.

Our family didn't do stockings, and I don't recall much of an emphasis on Santa Claus, but there were always some special gifts, particularly for Kathy and me, waiting

under our tree on Christmas morning. Mother always made a new outfit for one of my dolls, which made me very happy!

After opening our gifts and going to church for the Christmas Day service, we spent the afternoon at Great-Aunt Mary and Uncle Henry's home, celebrating with our Drexler aunts, uncles and cousins. Aunt Mary always baked many sugar cut-out cookies, and we cousins each received a dollar from her as well as one from Aunt Meda and one from Aunt Florence. Each of the little girls received a new handkerchief from each aunt as well. I remember how much I loved going into the parlor of Aunt Mary's house, where there was a phonograph and a reed organ. That was quite special!

Throughout the Christmas season we also visited other aunts' and uncles' homes, to see their Christmas trees and enjoy their cookies and candies. I envied Aunt Elise's family, because their tree had all-blue lights. Very fancy! And then Aunt Cora got "bubble lights," which I'd never seen before, and I loved those too. All those family visits made for happy memories full of beautiful lights, delicious treats, and loving family enjoying one another's company, all in the spirit of the season, celebrating the birth of Christ.

When it came time for confirmation, at age fourteen, that was very important to me. I took the classes seriously, learned the catechism. And then on Palm Sunday, our confirmation class sat up front during the service and Pastor asked us questions that we had to answer to be confirmed. That ceremony was on Palm Sunday every year.

At my baptism, when I was five weeks old, I'd had sponsors, which is what Lutherans call godparents. Mine were my Aunt Sophie and her husband, Uncle Fred. Sponsors were always invited to the confirmation ceremony, so they were there, and afterward they came to a dinner at our house.

And there were gifts. I believe I got a hymnal when I was confirmed, either from the church or maybe from my parents. I still have Kathy's hymnal from her confirmation, too, with her name embossed on it. My most treasured confirmation gift was a birthstone ring, a white sapphire which was a gift from my parents. I had been wanting that for a long time, so I remember it most. Much to my mother's sorrow, a few years later there was a fashion to use a ring to hold a neck-scarf in place, and while I'm sure she advised me not to use my confirmation ring that way, I did, and it slipped off one day and was lost forever.

When I left home for college, even with all my classes and music activities, I still made time for church services and activities. BGSU had an active religious community.

There was a chapel, there was a religious association. They had a kind of Religion Week each year; they would have seminars and that sort of thing. I was in the LSA, the Lutheran Students' Association, where we did Bible study, talked about topics of modern life, did service projects and did some singing together. There were 15 or 20 of us in the LSA.

When I moved to Sandusky to teach school, I remember that my parents came with me ahead of time and helped me find a Lutheran church that I could walk to, since I didn't have a car. It was always important to me to find a church right away, anywhere that I lived. Then, when I met Jerry, I started going with him to the church he was serving instead, and of course after we married I was very involved at all the churches he served as a pastor. Even after he left the ministry, the first thing we did when we moved to a new town was to find a congregation that we liked and become involved with it.

My connection to the Christian faith, and the Lutheran church in particular, has been ongoing all my life, and it's been pretty vital to me over the years. I'd certainly like that to be remembered about me, someday, after I'm gone.

I guess a lot of people, when they look back on their lives, think about their goals and whether or not they've achieved them. Other than taking care of my family and being a good servant of God, which for me includes caring for other people and being a good steward of the Earth, I don't think I've ever had any really big goals. But there's nothing I wanted to do and haven't done yet in my life, not really. I feel very fortunate, very blessed in so many ways. I've had a happy life, and I'm grateful for it.