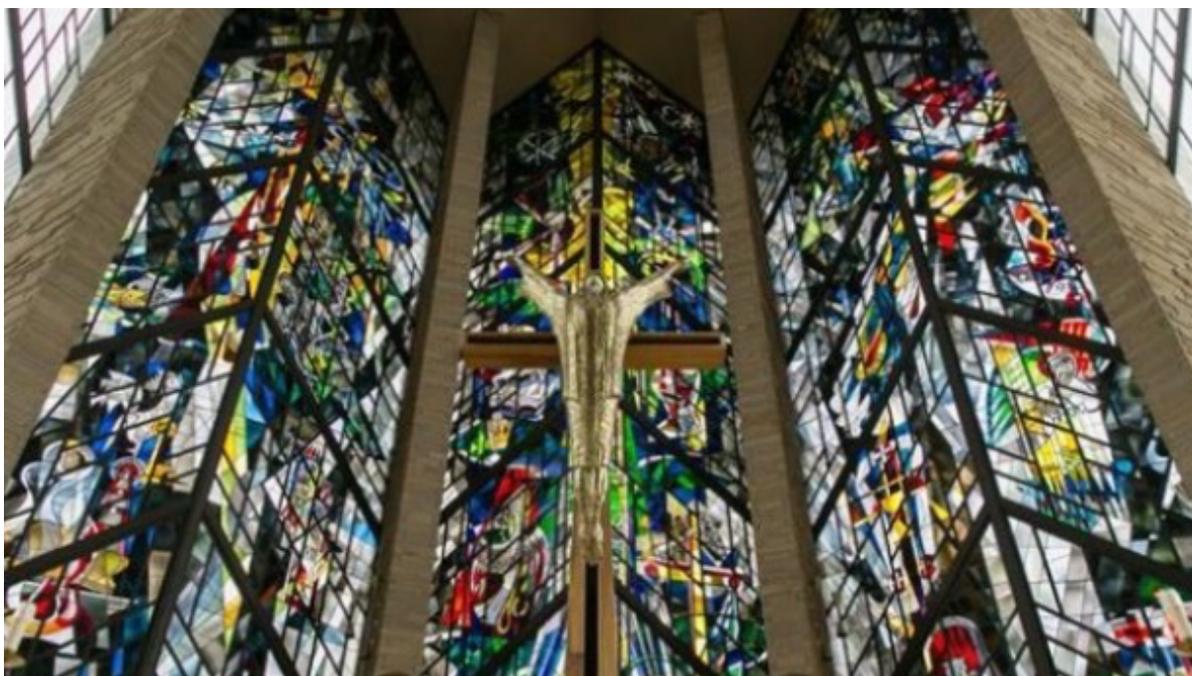


# Faith In Practice

Life Changing Medical Mission

## Big Shadows I Can Move In



*As most of you know, I finished a 500-mile cycling ride on Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup> to raise funds for Faith In Practice and then preached at the Chapel of the Resurrection at Valparaiso University that evening. This is an adaptation of that sermon.*

Let us pray: God of constancy, God of surprise, help us to feel your presence among us. Please enter into the places in each of our hearts where we need you most right now. Hold us close. Close, so that we might receive your healing, your blessing, your calling, so that when we leave this place, we might be nourished and emboldened to embody your love wherever we may go. Amen.

“Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” That is the question the great poet Mary Oliver asks us. I would expound upon her words, “Tell me, what do you plan to do

with your one wild and precious life that God has entrusted to your care?"

These are big questions. Questions that are pregnant with abundant possibility and limitless promise, pregnant with constricting pressure and paralyzing fear.

These are wonderful and hard questions in normal times. But now, they loom even larger, I know. Now, in this time of great uncertainty and tumult. This time of loss that we all are experiencing.

What just a short while ago we thought was routine, safe, reliable, is evaporating all around us. Loss of the past. I can no longer do what gave me joy. See or hug those I love. Loss of the present. I have missed being at the bedside of my loved-one as she died, I was not there when my baby, my grandbaby was born. Moments that will never be recaptured. A sense of loss of the future. How can I plan for my wild and precious life, when there is so much that is unknown, so much that is roiling around me, around the world, anywhere from stormy politics devoid of decency and respect to raging fires and hurricanes ripping through communities destroying pasts and futures.

We are lost, unmoored, bobbing on an unpredictable sea, either frantically scrambling for answers or simply dully absenting ourselves from the questions.

But, but... It is exactly in these places, these places, where and when we are most lost, that God can most easily find us. The times when we cannot rely upon the routine, the safe, the reliable, or the seemingly planned and certain future. It is in these moments that we are capable of opening ourselves to the unimagined and unplanned possibilities that God has in store for us. Possibilities that we never could have imagined for ourselves or for our world. Love and life that we never could have imagined, because we were so busy with our own plans, our own sense of security, our own expectations of what our lives should look like.

That has proven true throughout my own wild and precious life. At various times, I had my own set of plans and expectations of what my life would look like. But, it was only in the times when I could do nothing else but let myself fall, that I could clearly see God in my life. God catching me as I fell, lifting me up, leading me forward into newness of life. Opening up avenues and pathways that I never could have or would have found on my own. Would never have seen or acted upon. Our faithful God of Resurrection broadening my horizons, leading me into newness of life.

But, as soon as I was back on my feet, I forgot. I turned back to my routines, my planned future. And, it was hard for me to see the God I love. I had allowed myself to become lost again. Such is the ebb and flow of the life of faith.

But this time that we are now in?

This is a time for all of us to trust and let go. Even though everything inside of us is telling us to hold on. This is the time to let go of all the things that have made it hard for us to hear his voice. This is the time to believe in his possibilities, his future for us and for his world, not our own. Now is the time when we might just be ready to allow him to find us again. To allow him to lead us into a new life we never could have imagined for ourselves or for his world.

Now is a defining time in our lives of faith. And, it would be easy in these tumultuous days to throw up our hands, despair, and say we are lost, all is lost. But that is not true. For we follow Jesus, who did not turn away but walked into the tumult. Jesus who walked into others' pain. Jesus who loved this world with his all, because his God loved this world so well. Jesus who trusted in our God of Resurrection with his very life. The One who calls us to do the same, this day, every day, especially when it gets hard. Calling us to lose our lives for his name's sake, so that we might find our lives in him.

This is one of my favorite Rainer Rilke poems:

*God speaks to each of us as he makes us,  
Then walks with us silently out of the night.*

*These are the words we dimly hear:  
You, sent out beyond your recall,  
Go to the limits of your longing.  
Embody me.*

*Flare up like a flame  
And make big shadows I can move in.*

*Let everything happen to you:  
Beauty and terror.  
Just keep going. No feeling is final.  
Don't let yourself lose me.*

*Nearby is the country they call life.  
You will know it by its seriousness.*

*Give me your hand.*

'Tell me, what did you do with your one wild and precious life?'

My hope and prayer for you, for me, for us all, is that we will be able to say, 'I trusted in you, you

who knit me in my mother's womb and who I know will be there to welcome me home.' And that knowledge gave me courage through all the blessings and challenges, all of the gifts and all of the losses in life.

And, in the hardest of times, you found me so that I could live into your promises for me and for this world that you love so well. I listened for your voice, dear Lord, and I tried to go to the limits of my longing to embody you. I tried to make big shadows that you could move in. And, when I did, I felt my heart singing and I felt your glory.

There were times, though, when I lost you. I lost you. But you searched me, and you knew me. Even when I took the wings of the morning and settled at the farthest limits of the sea. Even in the darkest of nights, you found me. You always found me. I tried to live my life near your heart. My one wild and precious life. Near your heart.

St. Teresa of Avila once famously said: "*Christ has...no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he looks compassion on this world. Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good.*" I can think of no better way to live near the heart of God than that.

Our wild and precious lives lived near his heart. In him, through whom all things are possible.

All in honor of our God of Resurrection who is holding out newness of life to us this very day.

Amen and Amen,

Rev. Linda L. McCarty  
President & CEO

*Photo above is of the Chapel of the Resurrection at Valparaiso University.*

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