

David von Behren – Morning Prayer Talk – 10/30/19

As a child, I decided I had three favorite holidays - Christmas, Halloween, and the Fourth of July. Perhaps the reason July 4th made my childhood “TOP 3” was because it was the one day of the year that I as an 8-year-old, rural Nebraska boy, had free reign to play with fire and blow things up.

However, my fond memories of the Fourth of July holiday could not be more different than the associations my mother and grandmother make with this particular date. On July 4, 1967, when my mom was 7 years old, her father was tragically killed in a farming accident. July 4 marks the date my mother lost her father, and the date my grandma became a widow and was forced to accept her new role as a single parent to my mom and her 4-year-old brother.

But in that day 52 years ago, a collateral beauty began that would eventually triumph over the darkness, grief, and incredible pain. Collateral beauty I define as “the search for meaning amidst death and heartbreak; it results when grace abounds in the middle of suffering, despair, frustration, anger, depression, and death.”

In an attempt to fill the void of her father’s death, my mother was enrolled in piano lessons that same year. As it turned out, my mother took to music quickly...her music became her light in the darkness. Music was her form of grace. Fast forward a few years -- my mother graduated college with a degree in elementary education and embarked on her first full-time position as organist and Lutheran school teacher in Frankenmuth, MI. She fell in love with her boss’s son --- the man who is my father. Music continues to serve as collateral beauty and grace in my family. Though one can never be certain of the way God’s plan unfolds, it is possible that I would not be here today if the tragedy on July 4, 1967 hadn’t happened. I believe that collateral beauty has a ripple effect --- and one that can even be traced throughout generations.

On the first day of school one year, my mother learned that one of her first-grade students had lost his mother during the summer – on July 4. The boy came over and sat by her, and she told him, “You know, when I was exactly your age, my dad died on July 4th too.” Collateral beauty.

This summer, I spent a week with my other grandparents, my father’s parents, in Michigan. Their health has been steadily deteriorating over the last 3-4 years. My grandma often sleeps 18 hours a day, and dementia has done a number on her

short-term memory. It's tough to see family losing physical and mental facilities, but even in the dismal state in which I found my grandparents in this summer...I saw ever-present, "Collateral Beauty."

Every day, my grandfather goes over to the piano, sits down, and plays "You'll Never Walk Alone" from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, Carousel. He does this in an attempt to help my grandmother out of bed (if only for a few hours).

I'd like to take a moment to read the lyrics from this piece my grandpa plays invariably each morning; in fact, as it's after 8:30 a.m., I'm sure he's already played it today.

When you walk through a storm
Hold your head up high
And don't be afraid of the dark
At the end of a storm
There's a golden sky
And the sweet silver song of a lark
Walk on through the wind
Walk on through the rain
Though your dreams be tossed and blown
Walk on, walk on
With hope in your heart
And you'll never walk alone

Collateral beauty is something I've been taught throughout my life to embrace. In a world filled with so much darkness, we have to remember that God's grace is near. Grace takes many forms; when we wonder where God is in our darkest moments, we have to remember that God is even present in the faces of the people we pass at the supermarket, the office, church, school, etc. God works in us and through us, and we may unknowingly be a part of another person's collateral beauty.

Shortly before his death, Fred Rogers gave an interview with the Television Academy Foundation, in which he spoke the words his mother told him as a child, "Always look for the helpers; there will always be helpers."

While some of us may be lighting off fireworks on the 4th of July, remember there are others longing to feel something besides despair --- people who want to feel hope, love, and belonging. Today, I charge you with a mission. Show others

grace - the grace God offers us. I ask you to be a part of someone else's collateral beauty.

I would like to offer the words of John 14:27 in prayer. Let us pray.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
Amen.