**DEATH**

In the fall of the year, my wife and I love to look at the colors in the trees. We are amazed at the variety. We know that the colors are caused by the root temperatures producing various kinds of carotenes in the leaves. But the scientific stuff doesn’t enter our minds when we look at them. We just think of God as an amazing Artist. It happens not only in the autumn, but also every evening. God creates an amazing sunset of many colors and almost infinite variety. It’s like the snowflakes; it’s never the same. Artists can paint a sunset, but it never has the power or glow of the real thing—and certainly not the size. A sunset covers hundreds of miles. The death of the day is beautiful.

Death can be beautiful also, like the death of trees in fall. When my dad had cancer, we were so relieved when he died. He had gone from a healthy 160 lbs. to a pain-filled, weak and unhealthy 81 lbs. before he died. His death was a blessing to him and to our family. When my mom died at age 92, it was a beautiful thing, too. Her quality of life had become so bad, that she decided not to eat any more. She asked her doctor for a “pain patch,” which would help her sleep. She didn’t eat for four days. Our family stood around her bed and sang hymns as she slept. She woke up briefly and said, “I love you all.” The next day she died.

Death can be a beautiful release from the suffering of disease and the seeming hopelessness of sin. Part of St. Francis of Assisi’s prayer says, “…it is by dying that we are born to eternal life.” Life may not really end at death. My faith tells me it doesn’t, that life goes on. Death may usher us into the very presence of God. Those who have faith believe that they will be “saved” through death—that God will keep them safe even after death.

When Jesus died on the cross, he said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” In Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrote about the spirit. He asked, “Does the spirit go into the ground, or does it return to the God who gave it?” I think Jesus’ statement on the cross helps answer that. My faith tells me that my spirit at death will go to God, in whom I believe and whom I follow. He will protect our life and give us a new existence with him.

In one way, death ends and completes the meaninglessness of this life. In another way, death gives the ultimate meaning of this life. Either we live on, or we don’t. If we do, we should realize that death can be beautiful.