

Sisters by Choice

The oldest of four boys, my husband married first followed by his brother Jerry. Jerry's wife and I bonded from the very start. For over forty years, we were sisters by choice - true soul sisters.

Not everyone knows when she is going to die. Diane did. Over two weeks in hospice gave Diane the chance to say and do things that brought honor to God and joy to her loved ones.

In her life and in her death God was bringing glory to Himself by conforming her to the image of His Son. These are a few of the ways I saw Jesus in her.

A Place to Call Home

Like Jesus, Diane was always busy preparing a place of peace and joy for loved ones.

Diane on occasion worked outside of the home, but at heart she was a homemaker. The goal of her life was to make a home for those she loved. She succeeded.

From the wonderful scents of burning candles and enticing foods to a decorating style that said, "you are welcome here", her home was always a warm, inviting, comforting place to be.

Diane was without question the best cook I have ever known. She shared with me everything from unique kitchen items to sourdough starters to great recipes. My family knows that all my best recipes came from Diane. She produced her own cookbook but I admit on occasion I have been unsuccessful in duplicating those delightful dishes. She just had a gift.

Besides her culinary skills, Diane tried her hand at anything that would make her home a more attractive place to be - inside and outside. She was always preparing something to make her home a sanctuary for her loved ones.

"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you" (John 14:2).

Thoughtful Gift Giver

Like Jesus, Diane delighted in giving gifts.

She and I shared a love for olives. It was a joke at family get-togethers as to who would get to the olive dish first. One year for my birthday she gave me a five-gallon jar of olives. The miracle was she didn't expect me to share!

Among many other hand made gifts from Diane, my husband and I treasure a framed cross-stitch of Psalm 8. No effort or time expended was too much for Diane to express her love.

During her time in hospice, one of her concerns was that gifts she had set aside for friends and for my husband's upcoming birthday would get delivered. She was always thinking of others.

Certainly the ultimate gift giver is Jesus Himself. He gave of Himself, He multiplied loaves of bread and small fish to give to crowds, He produced fish for the fishermen after they had already given up and His Holy Spirit gave special gifts to each of His followers. His greatest gift was our salvation. He delighted in giving.

"But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says, 'When He ascended on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men' "(Ephesians 4:7-8). "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Corinthians 9:15).

The Best of Friends

Like Jesus, Diane was a loyal friend - someone you knew you could count on - someone you could trust.

Ask practically any friend of Diane's and she would probably tell you Diane was her best friend. Her capacity for friendship was enormous - once her true friend, always her friend.

"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you" (John 15: 13, 15).

Discerning Spirit

Like Jesus, Diane had a supernatural ability to judge character.

She knew intuitively whether someone was genuine or not. She could easily recognize pretense and had no toleration for it.

Diane could tell a lot about me by just looking at my eyes. I imagine it was the same for everyone else she loved.

"But Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men, and had no need that anyone should testify of man, for He knew what was in man" (John 2:24-25).

Lover of Children

Like Jesus, Diane loved the little children.

When God wanted to touch Diane's heart, He gave her another child to love.

She transferred her love of animals to children in her family. There was always a dog or two in her home. She even had a llama. She raised ducks for the children to enjoy.

During the days just preceding her death and knowing her end was near, Diane was eager to get unhooked from a life saving machine so that she could go somewhere where she could see the children. God blessed in providing an apartment where everyone could visit.

Surrounded by her beloved children, grandchildren and great grandchildren, one day some of her husky guys carried her downstairs so that she could see the ducks in the pond.

Many photographs were taken during that time. Some of the most precious are those where several children were climbing all over her. There was an expression of pure joy on her face.

"But Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not forbid them, for of such is the kingdom of God' " (Matthew 19:14).

Focus on Others

Like Jesus, Diane's thoughts were of others. Her actions followed suit.

After Diane learned she was going to die, I was able to spend a day at the hospital with her. I was witness to her sharing her heart and her love with loved ones that day. Her thoughts were not of her own circumstance or comfort. Her thoughts were of others.

"Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.... I pray for them. I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me that they may be one as We are (John 17:1, 9-11).

Forgiveness

Like Jesus, Diane knew how to forgive.

During her lifetime, Diane was always fiercely protective of her loved ones. During those last days in the hospital, she was told someone who had caused considerable pain to her family wanted to visit but was reluctant because he didn't want to upset the family. Her response was, "Tell him he is welcome. During a time like this, all is forgiven."

"And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left. Then Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do' " (Luke 23:33-34).

Eternal Joy

Like Jesus, when Diane died, she went into the presence of our Father.

Diane died with a smile on her face. I wasn't there, but her husband and daughters tell me that she had not opened her eyes for over a day. Her daughters sang to her "You are my sunshine" (the song she used to sing to children in her family). Diane opened her eyes, looked at them, smiled, and drew her last breath.

That moment was a gift from God to those of us who love Diane and a gift from Diane whose desire was to bring joy to those she loved.

Jesus said to His followers: "Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you" (John 16:22). Jesus said to His

Father: "But now I come to You, and these things I speak in the world, that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13).

Sisters by Choice and Sisters Forever

Like Jesus, our brother, Diane's presence was always a comfort to me.

Engraved in my memory is Diane's smile when I came through the her hospital door and her comment, "There is my sister." I will forever be grateful for the long hug we shared.

I thank my husband for having a brother who married Diane. I thank his brother for making such a great choice. Most of all, I thank God.

In the hospital, nurses came in and Diane would introduce me as her sister. Other family members laughed when one nurse said, "I thought I saw a family resemblance."

Diane and I did not have the same earthly parents, but we do have the same Heavenly Father who adopted us both into His eternal family.

We are truly sisters by choice - God's choice.

"For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs - heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together" (Romans 8:15-17).

Stephanie B. Blake
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