

Claudia Purves
8/23/51-6/24/11

As the writer of Ecclesiastes so eloquently put it, *“for everything there is a season, and a time for every activity under heaven. A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. A time to cry and a time to laugh. A time to grieve and a time to dance.”*

Dear friends and family, today is a time to grieve for Claudia. It's time to cry; we have to say goodbye to someone we care about. It's time to mourn: she was still so young, with so much love to give. And yet, we can hold fast to the hope that this time will pass, and we can trust that God *will* turn our mourning into dancing. That is, after all, part of the cycle of the cosmos – birth gives way to life which passes into death. And amidst it all, we can believe that God is holding all our days in his hand. They all belong to God.

Claudia Jean Purves' days began in Rochester, Minn., on August 23, 1951. She was the firstborn of Ray and Phyllis Purves, eventually becoming the big sister to John. Right from the start Claudia filled her days to the fullest. She was friendly, outgoing, intelligent, with an insatiable curiosity. When she was in kindergarten she joined the local Brownie troop ... that was the beginning of many years with the Girl Scouts. Some of her closest childhood friendships came from her time with Scouts. It also nurtured a love of the outdoors – she loved to go camping, or hiking, or on picnics. In school Claudia excelled both in academics and in music. When she was in high school her family started hosting foreign exchange students. They became particularly close to Louisa from Venezuela, who became a life-long family friend. That opened a door to a bigger world, with travels that took her from Portland to New Mexico to India to Peru and beyond.

After high school Claudia studied in Mankato, then transferred to the University of Minnesota where she earned a degree in physical therapy. For Claudia it was always a

time to heal. The healing arts was one of her passions. Physical therapy helped her heal people's bodies – but her compassion, generous spirit and genuine concern probably healed them emotionally and spiritually too.

Claudia's days became fuller as Amy and William joined the family, and then fuller still as she raised them as a single parent. Eventually she settled in Fairfield, Iowa, where she found a community of friends who could love and support her young family. She bought an old Victorian house. It took a lot of work to fix it up, but Claudia turned it into a haven of hospitality, where there was always room for one more at the table – and there was always one more, especially if it was a day she'd baked one of her famous apple pies. There was always *a time to plant and a time to harvest* -- she loved working in her flower garden and cooking with organic fruits and vegetables. And she enjoyed meditating, feeling her connection with all of creation.

Yes, for everything there is a season, and a time for every activity under heaven. Claudia made the most of her time to live. And then, sadly, her time to die came. It feels too soon. A few weeks ago her fight with cancer was near the end. She was surrounded by people who loved her. It was time for her to let go. Perhaps we can find comfort in the words of the Apostle Paul. Paul knew his share of hardship and sorrow. Yet in the face of all things Paul believed that *God could work all things together for good*. And so, in the letter to the Romans, he writes, "I know that nothing – not death nor life, not angels nor demons, not things present nor things to come, not powers or height or depth or anything in creation – nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus." We don't always understand God's time. But we can understand God's heart. It's a big heart with lots of room. It's a generous heart, one that gave us Claudia Jean to know and to love. It's

a caring heart, which rejoices when we care for one another. It's a forgiving heart, which continues to call us back with ever-open arms.

So now it is time. It's time to bid Claudia farewell, for today, anyway. Someday our mourning will give way to dancing. And because of Jesus we know that nothing – not miles, not time, not space, not cancer, not even death – nothing can separate us from God's loving heart. Thanks be to God. Amen.