

Jay Philip Weichselbaum
9/25/57-8/31/11

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 play and a time to work. 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 Jay. It’s a time to cry: we have to say goodbye to someone we care about. It’s a time to mourn: he 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.

Jay Philip Weichselbaum’s *time to be born* was in Rochester, Minn., on September 25, 1957. He came into this world with his twin brother, Paul. They lived in a house near 4th St. SE, amidst a neighborhood that would shape his love of community right from the start. Even as a kid, Jay was smart, and funny, and could charm anyone. (Sounds a lot like another cute little blond kid I know, doesn’t it, Ben?) As a teenager, Jay got involved in theater, and was a part of Mayo High School’s Southtown Singers jazz choir – not because he could sing, or dance, he said, but because he looked good on stage. Jay could stand behind a mic and talk his way through anything. In college, he was the quintessential Carleton student – brilliant, exciting, pretty sure he was usually right. After college came his *time to work*. – though someone once said that when you love what you do, it doesn’t seem like work. Jay was one of the lucky few who epitomized that statement.

Let it be said, though, that Jay had his *time to play*, too, be it cards or video games or ball in the backyard. Of course, being a grown-up, his toys were a bit bigger: jetskis and

windsurfers and his two-seater aluminum plane. And what kid doesn't love going to Disneyworld? For Jay, there was no cooler place on earth. Yes, Jay may have been a kid at heart, but he especially had a heart for kids. He adored his niece and nephew, Matt and Sarah. The hours he spent volunteering in the public schools and hanging out with other kids on the cul-de-sac were his *time to build up*. He was determined to be a role model and encourager as so many people had been for him.

It was as he was organizing a retirement celebration for one of his own father figures, Mayo music teacher Jerry Smith, that Jay became reacquainted with Enid Gjelten. Jay and Enid been friends while at Mayo – Enid says that may have been because she, being older, had a driver's license. When they reconnected years later, it was clear they had become a good match. They could talk passionately about anything, and they both loved to travel. But finding a partner in your 40s is tricky. You've got routines and habits and certain ways of doing things. Enid said she and Jay had to be very patient with each other. He admitted his biggest fear was that Enid would try to change him. But when it is your *time to love*, somehow God gives you the courage to give your heart away anyway. In 1999, Jay and Enid were married. The twelve years they shared together as husband and wife were too few.

And, of course, of all the times in Jay's life, perhaps the most important was his *time to parent*. When Ben was born, it changed Jay forever. He restructured his consulting business so he could spend as much time as possible with his family. There was always time for one more story, one more push on the swingset, one more game on the Wii with Ben. And every day of that time was precious to Jay, and to his little boy.

There's a dragonfly on the cover of the bulletin today. I don't know exactly why Enid chose this picture – I didn't ask her – but I do know the dragonfly is a symbol of renewal,

maturity, and insight. Those things certainly describe Jay, whose love of community and family guided the choices he made and anchored the way he treated others.

But there's one more thing the dragonfly symbolizes. It's perhaps the most meaningful on a day like today. For Christians, the dragonfly is a symbol of emerging from death into life. Its short life is a reminder that though all of our days must come to an end, that end is but a beginning of a new life with God.

Perhaps there were dragonflies flitting about a year ago July. While reveling in a glorious Minnesota summer with family up at the lake, Jay started to see flickers of light. Within a few weeks, doctors found a mass on his brain. It turned out it wasn't a time to heal, after all. Indeed, Jay began to realize that soon it would be his *time to die*. But, being Jay, he didn't want to waste a minute. He tended to his relationship with his brother Paul. He made sure everything with his business was in order. He spent extra time with Enid and Ben. On Wednesday, they all went to meet Ben's new first grade teacher. And then, Wednesday afternoon, in the blink of an eye, he was gone.

There is so much about death we cannot understand. Does it hurt? Do you know what's happening? What comes next? Perhaps that's why, in the NRSV translation of the 1 Corinthians passage we just heard, St. Paul writes, "Lo, I will tell you a mystery." But I like the translation Enid selected: "I will tell you a wonderful secret." That wonderful secret is that for God's people, death is not the end. It is a transformation. When we pass from this life to the next, we are changed. We are made whole – no more tears, no more pain, no more blindness or brain tumors or broken hearts. God promises to gather us together, to create a new kind of community. Like the dragonfly, we enter a new time, a time where those who wait for the Lord will find their strength renewed forever.

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 Jay to know and to love. It's a caring heart, which rejoices when we build up 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 Jay 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 tumors, not even death – nothing can separate us from God's loving heart. Thanks be to God. Amen.