

Jesus and the Christmas Tree

“How old are you, grandma?” Family was gathered at the senior care center to celebrate her birthday. She thought for a while, and we waited. Finally, she smiled at us and said, “I don’t know, how old am I?” We replied that she was 93. There was a far-off look, then her familiar sweet smile, and she said, “Then it won’t be long now.” She was waiting for the angels to take her to heaven.

Grandma’s birthday was in May. Summer, fall, and winter followed. Visits from family and friends continued. Grandma had memory loss and she seldom remembered having visitors. But she remembered things that were important to her, such as living faith. She greeted with “God’s Peace!” and found comfort from songs of Zion and the forgiveness for her sins.

Things changed, health failed, and she slipped into a coma-like condition. The family was called, and late one evening we arrived at the care center. Her breathing was labored. She did not respond to our greeting or touch. Other family members gathered and we sang songs. This brought us comfort, and possibly to grandma, too.

The next morning the head nurse came to visit. She said this could be the end of grandma’s life and asked us for health care directives. Knowing that grandma longed for heaven, we asked to keep her comfortable. We would leave matters of life and death in the hands of God, our Creator.

Two days passed, and my wife and I remained. Grandma began to stir and we approached. “Hi, grandma!” Her eyes were open, but it seemed that she didn’t see or hear us. Instead her face was expressive and she looked beyond us as if she could see something, or someone. Her eyes gazed all around the room and we looked around too, thinking there may be heavenly visitors. We saw nothing. After a few moments, her eyes closed and she slipped back into the coma-like state.

Now, I too needed to return to my work. I was halfway home when the phone shattered my deep thoughts. The caller ID indicated it was my wife. Immediately I regretted leaving and braced myself for a tearful call.

“Guess what!” the cheerful voice exclaimed. “What?” I replied, clearly puzzled by the joy. “Mom woke up and we had one of the best visits in years, she was clear and alert!” “Amazing!” was all I could say. “Mom is sleeping now,” she said. We wondered whether she would continue to be as lucid.

Grandma’s clarity was gone when she awoke from her nap. She continued to be as she had been before the “episode.” Her 94th birthday came and life continued. On one visit, a worker at the home approached us. She asked if there was some significant event in grandma’s life about Jesus and a Christmas tree. She said that grandma is often repeating a phrase about Jesus and the Christmas tree. Nothing more—just that phrase.

We could only speculate as grandma never did add anything more. Was she thinking about Christmas and the birth of the Lord and Savior Jesus? It seemed logical because of her faith in God and the merit work of Jesus. Why the Christmas tree? Was this a “marker” for her so she would know when it was Christmas? After all, birthdays and time had no meaning for her. But the question remained. “Why did she start repeating this phrase?”

On December 20, we stood by her bed. Once again, she was in a coma-like state. Her breathing was slowing down. We blessed her and assured her that she could leave, that it would be okay. There was no response, but the breathing continued to get slower and slower. We wondered if there would be another breath.

Suddenly, she opened her eyes, looked at us, and said “Bye, bye.” Soon she took her last breath. The angels carried her to Jesus. As we left, we noticed the Christmas tree in the community room.

Rod and Elaine Nikula

Discussion thoughts and questions:

1. Share the thoughts you had as you read or listened to this writing.
2. Share other examples of a believer’s longing for heaven.
3. How could believers approach someone that seems to be “in a coma?”
4. What are some ways that we can keep Jesus as the focus of Christmas in our life and home?