

I recently was listening to a song written and sung by Carly Simon, who is probably best known by those of us that came of age in the late 60's or 70's. In it she has questions about what lies ahead. Among the lyrics is this haunting question:

Won't you tell me please

That life is eternal

And love is immortal

And death is only a horizon

Many of my most spiritual moments have taken outside the church setting: surrounded instead by the beauty and mystery of the natural world. It's been during these times that I've discovered and feel comfortable with my answer to her question.

As a former teacher of earth science and biology I've always been intrigued by the never ending cycles found in our world and the deep universe. The life and death cycle of stars, the rock cycle, water cycle, nitrogen cycle,... Sailing through a clear moonless night with stars stretching from horizon to horizon, I'm awed by the knowledge that as supernovas explode destroying themselves they're spewing forth the substances from which new stars will form. I've been awe struck on the big island of Hawaii watching new rock formed by volcanic action while at the same time seeing the hard basaltic coastline being weathered and eroded by ocean waves that will eventually turn it into new soil; I've been awed hiking in the Ho rain forest of Washington looking up at the fir, spruce, and redwood trees reaching hundreds of feet in the air and at the same time seeing the massive trunks of fallen trees decomposing, nourishing fungi, and acting as nurse logs to new seedlings. I'm awe struck during rainstorms how water from our vast oceans falls back to earth as freshwater to nourish living things. I've daydreamed wondering where those raindrops have been during the eons of time; locked in glacier ice for thousands of years, what rivers or streams they've made their way down, in what places on earth have they've brought life to crops,.....Where will they end up next. I've been soothed listening to the

heartbeat of the earth as waves crash upon the shore or as water flows down mountain streams. These cycles have been endless and for eons have been renewing our planet and universe; they are eternal.. Aren't we as living beings part of creation's never ending circle of life. Science has shown that we're made from the same elements as all other things in our universe. We have found that our DNA is passed on from generation to generation. I believe that Martin Luther would still say today, knowing what we know of science, what he said long ago: **Our Lord has written the promise of resurrection, not in books alone, but in every leaf in springtime.** But to maintain this renewal of our planet's life cataclysmic events must take place. Forest fires are needed to maintain healthy forests, violent seismic and volcanic activity is part of the rock cycle, death of living things is needed to complete the nitrogen cycle,... The beauty of earth's creation can't take place without these sometimes horrible events. It's only with the passage of time that we can see the benefits that come from them. Nor can human life take place without difficult and troubling times.

I was reminded of this this past summer while completing a boat delivery down the length of Lake Michigan to Chicago. During the sail down we experienced a variety of weather conditions. We experienced some perfect sailing: warm steady breezes, sunny skies, a moonless starlit night,...With the boat on autopilot we sat back and each of us aboard in our own way said or thought "how lucky can I be". But nature also provided us with an incredible light show as a series of thunderstorm cells built on the horizon and headed our way. After making sail changes, manually taking over the helm and tethering ourselves to the boat we waited for the unknown, not knowing exactly what the storm would bring and hoping that we and the boat would make it unscathed through the turmoil that would come with the passing storms. As the storms dissipated and we unclipped our safety harnesses each of us was thankful for the security it provided dealing with the forces during that time of uncertainty.

During all of our lives, there are times where life is good – we enjoy our work, our relationships are fulfilling, our health is good. Life is on autopilot and one wonders – how lucky can I be. But we all experience our personal storms; where we seem to be dealing with forces beyond our control – the death of a love one, a serious illness, a job loss, self doubt, spiritual doubt, alienation in a friendship or marriage relationship, facing the unknown as we're about to begin a new chapter of our lives, We find ourselves floundering, uncertain about the future,... But like the security of the lifeline on the safety harness god's love sees us through these difficult times. The living god in every one of us is shown through us as we reach out to those in need - in every act of kindness, no matter how large or small. We receive this love in every gesture – no matter how large or small – that comes our way in our times of need. As difficult as these individual trials are over time we come to realize that with the love we've received we're stronger and more perceptive as a result. Perspectives change, we become more empathic, more patient, more forgiving, little things in life bring more joy. Love does not exist unless it is shared. It's seen in daily acts of kindness, caring, compassion, and forgiveness. It is the substance that gets us through our darkest times, refreshes life when we're tired, and enriches life on a daily basis. This sharing of the living god through acts of love and kindness is found in every one of us. It cuts across culture and is found worldwide. To quote another songwriter, Jimmy Buffett:

It's the buddhist in you, it's the pagan in me
It's the muslim in him, she's catholic ain't she?
It's the born again look it's the wasp and the jew

By loving abundantly our spirit impacts others, is remembered and shared, and is past on from generation to generation. The signs are all around us. God has made life eternal in his creation and we make love immortal by sharing it abundantly with all those around us. This I believe.