

Resurrection Lutheran May 17, 2009  
The Moments In Between  
© 2009 Karen Pavlicin



I'm honored to be here with you today. I was invited here by my neighbor, Rachel Dillon. And that act by itself is a sign for me.

Usually, when someone asks me to come speak, it's because they've heard me speak or they've read something in one of my books that stuck with them. But Rachel has watched my life from across the street. She and my other neighbors have watched me accidentally hang my flag upside down in the international sign of distress. They've laughed and celebrated happy moments with me. They've helped me fix everything from my roof to my toilet. And they've held my hand in those times when the most reasonable thing to do was to curl up in a ball in the corner and cry. They helped me stand up when I could have stayed down.

About five years ago I wrote a mission statement for myself. I decided my mission was to inspire others through my everyday celebration of life. So when Rachel said she wanted me to come here today because I inspired her, I thought hmmm maybe getting up the next morning is actually working.

You see I've been going through what I call a 10-year growth spurt that has affected more than my waistline.

Ten years ago, life was perfect.

I was married to my best friend, Bob. We'd recently moved into a nice home on a cul de sac in the suburbs. I had an interesting management job at the headquarters of an international corporation. I was in the best shape of my life physically. I'd just had a wonderful healthy pregnancy, and after only 3 hours and 16 minutes of labor gave birth to the most amazing human being I know, my son, Alexander Maximilian.

Life was a fairytale.

A year and a half later my husband was diagnosed out of the blue with stage 4 colon cancer. He died two years later in 2003, just after his 38<sup>th</sup> birthday.

In 2004, I was laid off from that corporate job.

In 2005, my dad died suddenly of a massive heart attack. He was 64.

In 2006, my house was struck by lightning and I had to replace most of the appliances, microwave, TVs, phones, computer.

In 2007, I was attacked by a swarm of yellowjackets. It took the pros two weeks to get rid of the 5 colonies of 25,000 yellowjackets harbored in my side yard.

And then there were the times I had to replace the furnace and the snowblower wouldn't start, and more than once I had to be rescued from a nonworking vehicle on the side of the road.

Still, as I was recently reflecting on all that has happened, I realized that this does not describe the last ten years of my life. It describes about seven big life-changing events plus a few miscellaneous days in between that caused me to cry in frustration or enlist the help of one of my wonderful neighbors.

But there were more than 3635 other days. And just like the 30 pounds that slowly changed my pant size from that perfect ten, it is the 3635 other days in the last ten years that have slowly but surely allowed me to grow into the person I am today.

When I wrote that mission statement for myself five years ago, I was a wanderer. A wife with no husband, a worker with no job, a daughter without a father. So I sat down and decided to focus on what I did have and who I was and who I wanted to be.

I made a few rules for myself. Rules like:

- I will not ever drink alone.
- I will laugh every day.
- I will remember that God loves me.
- I will count my blessings, even if some days that means counting my toes.

The fact is, in the past ten years, I've grown closer to God, closer to friends. Closer to my angels in heaven. And I have tried and succeeded at more than I ever thought could be possible.

I'd like to share with you a few things I've learned on this journey, a few things that keep me getting up the next morning, a few of what I call God's kisses on the cheek.



I'll start with three things that have formed a sort of motto in my life. A few months ago, some of the women from this church went on a retreat. The theme of the retreat, based on the letters of Saint Paul, was "live, laugh, love." Well, for Mother's Day, Alexander painted me a sign for the kitchen. He said he chose this phrase b/c it sounded like me. Awww. And it's true, with a twist. First in my motto:

### Laugh

- One day before preschool, Alexander came downstairs wearing one of my frumpiest bras on the outside of his clothes. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "I'm going to wear this to school." I said, "No you're not." He said, "But don't you think my friends would think this is funny?" I'm sure they would. You're not wearing it, but wait right there while I get a camera b/c I know a lot of other people who would think this is funny.
- Laughter is medically proven to be good for you. A good dose of humor has gotten me through so many days. I remember vividly the day I rediscovered laughter.
- Just before the one-year anniversary of what we call Bob's heaven birthday, we went to Disney with one of my best friends and her daughter. At Disney there are these long lines outside the real entertainment, where they give you sort of a preshow to keep you entertained while standing in line. We were in that preshow line watching the muppets chase each other from TV to TV and suddenly I hear uncontrollable giggling beside me. Alexander was in stitches watching the silliness. Everyone in the line turned and looked at him and smiled and started giggling too. He reminded me how wonderful it feels just to laugh.
- Make yourself a rule. Laugh every day.



## Love

- See through eyes of love. We're usually hardest on those we love most. So I put photos around my house to remind me of the reasons I love the people in my life. I write love notes in lunch boxes. And every night before I go to bed, I go in and watch Alexander sleep. Watch your loved ones sleep – you'll fall in love all over again for the next day.



So laugh, love, and (my version of “live”):

Buy more underwear

- Let's face it. When do you really need to do laundry? When you're out of clean underwear. So if you have more underwear, you can do laundry less often. Managing those less important tasks allows you to spend more time on what IS important.



- Like making snowmen
- Running through the sprinklers
- Singing a song with a friend
- or watching a sunset



## Carpe diem - Seize the day

- Stop and notice those moments. Sometimes we need prodding to pay attention. One day Bob called to me to come outside right away. I remember feeling a little annoyed at first that he wanted me to just drop whatever I was doing, but when I came outside, I was so glad I did. I was mesmerized. At the end of our driveway were hundreds of birds, singing and playing in a huge puddle. It's still the most spectacular site I've seen.
- Another time, Alexander and I were shoveling the driveway and I just wanted to be done. Alexander climbed up onto the snow bank and laid down on his back. He said "c'mere Mom." So I went over and laid down beside him. The night was quiet and the snow kept falling softly. We just laid there together holding hands, looking up at the sky, and letting all those snowflakes land softly on our faces. It was so beautiful. Let yourself have those moments.

Ecclesiastes tells us “to everything there is a season.”



- Winter is often the hardest season. We’ve all faced winter. We all have some moment, some event, some relationship that we can call to mind that’s been challenging – that feels like winter. Winter takes extra work in fewer hours of daylight. It’s cold. There are unexpected snowstorms. It’s lonelier.
- But winter is necessary too – we all need time in our personal lives, our relationships, even our economy – to step back and reflect, to allow some things to die or sleep for a while.
- There are great challenges and also beautiful rewards and good comforts.



Moving from one season to the next is not always easy. We can forget in our excitement and anticipation that in spring it doesn’t just get warmer each day. Sometimes winter stays longer than we expect. Sometimes it’s stormy. There’s mud and rain. And it can take a while for the flowers to bloom. Grief is like that too. There’s no time when it’s just over. It comes and goes. It took me two years to gather the energy to go through Bob’s clothes to donate them. When I did, there was a pair of jeans that still smelled like him.

And yet in spring there is hope. We know the buds will open eventually.



God brings us grace in unexpected ways. When Bob died, I couldn't write. There were no words that held any meaning. Then one night I was standing at the stove trying to cook dinner and a song came in my head. A song that expressed how much I missed Bob and how grateful I was that I still had our stories to tell. The first part of the song goes like this:

Ever since you've been gone, I've been wandering around  
I see you in everything, hear you in every song  
Yet your smell, your touch flies away with the breeze  
And all that I'm left with is our stories

Is it the tears in my eyes that make your image blurred?  
Is your star the closest bridge between Heaven and Earth?  
How can I lay my head in your shoulder and dream about tomorrow?  
How do I celebrate life without you here?

Stories, stories, all that I'm left with is our stories  
Bridging Heaven and Earth, tomorrow, today, and yesterday  
One moment at a time, we celebrated life  
And when you celebrate life, you've got stories to tell

That song was the first song of more than 40 that became a way for me to express what I was feeling and to ask the questions my heart wanted to ask. Twelve of those songs are on the CD you heard on the way in. Now I receive letters from people who've heard these songs just when they needed them in their lives. God's grace travels.





There are messages all around us if we look and listen. They are in the time spent with our families – my brother and sisters took this picture when we all came home for the fish feed.

The winter my dad died, he had been catching perch for the town fish feed. He had 1300 fillets in the freezer. In fact, he was walking out on Red Lake to go ice fishing when he had his heart attack. My brother and my dad's friends caught the rest of the fish, including the northern pike for the fish chowder, after Dad died. We all came home to our small town in upstate NY and we served that fish to a sold out crowd at the Knights of Columbus hall.

My dad taught us how to fish by his example.

At his wake, we found out that he had been helping some of the men in my family's small town. He made sure they had food, could join in the KofC football pool, and keep their dignity during some tough times.

He did it out of love and we never knew about it until he died. Now I look at my own work as a ministry.

Sometimes we find messages in a book.

About a year ago I read Elizabeth Gilbert's story *Eat, Pray, Love*. There is a scene when she's in India and she decides that she doesn't have to work things out with her ex-husband in person. She can offer it up and let her soul and his soul work it out. That scene had such an impact on me.



We all have shadows in our hearts. We all have people we can forgive. I've learned that forgiveness requires our change of heart and no one else's.

I immediately made a list of everyone in my life I could forgive – that kid in high school, the bad boss, the mean coworker, the friend who never returns my calls, the employee who no longer thinks the world of me. I listed them by name and said “I forgive you Dan. I forgive you Sue.” And I went down the list. And then I thought of everyone I might need to say I'm sorry to. And I made a list and said “I'm sorry Peter.” And went down that list. My soul had a lot of work to do. But it was so freeing.

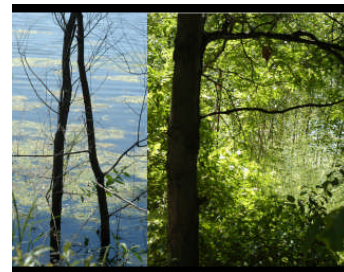
I highly recommend forgiving people – with all your heart – even if you won't have an opportunity to do it in person – and especially when the person you need to forgive is yourself.

I've found inspiration in the voices around me. In the friendships in this room.

Even in the trees.

If you look closely, this day the trees were talking to Alexander... see the A and the P.

There are messages everywhere.



This morning when I was putting on my necklace, I realized that inspiration can come at any time, too. I bought this necklace b/c it has a compass on it. It was a reminder for myself that I've traveled far and a journey can go in any direction. My job is to keep taking one step.

Well, this morning as I was putting it on,  
I noticed an inscription on the back I didn't know was there.  
It says "The journey begins today."

Now there's a reason to get up in the morning.

Since I'm a writer, I've come to think of my own life as being like a novel. The first book didn't end the way I thought it would but it was still a really good book. And now I'm in book two. BTW we can all start a new book in our lives when we need to. There are some of the same characters in my second book and a few story lines continued, but there are new people too. At first I was anxious about the second book. I thought I wanted to know the ending right away, but then I realized I really wanted to enjoy the story and read each page as the story unfolds. I like to read the language and pay attention to the details. I try not to rush ahead, but to read each chapter even with all its twists and surprises.



I've discovered that much of life is perspective. How we look at it. How we tell the story.

And since a good story is all in how you tell it...let me try again to tell you a few things about my life the past ten years.

- I've learned you can still love someone with all your heart even when you're apart. And that love can last forever.
- I've learned that it's hard to feel angry or depressed or even the least bit sad when you're playing good dance music. We like music. We like to dance.



- I no longer need or want a corporate job. After leaving that world, I began to pour my creativity into writing. Today I get to spend part of each day writing books and singing songs and using my gifts to make a difference in people's lives. In



the past six years, I've had four books published and a music CD released. I helped grow a company that's delivered more than 75,000 books to military families. I started a foundation and donate all the profits from my music to cancer research – my goal is to raise a million dollars.

- Because lightning took out my TV and VCR, I now have TiVo.

This year, Alexander and I watched in order all 139 episodes of I Dream of Jeannie – and then went to I Dream of Jeannie Lane in Cocoa Beach just for fun.



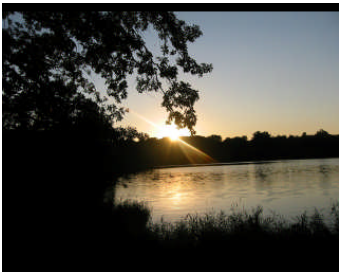
- I learned I'm not deathly allergic to wasp stings.
- We traveled to 16 states visiting family and friends.
- Alexander lost 13 teeth and the tooth fairy came every time.
- We spent time at Ground Zero trying to understand things that went missing in our lives and spent time looking up at the moon considering all the possibilities before us.
- I took more than 20,000 photographs.
- I laughed more than I cried.



And yes, I gained 30 pounds. Remember I said I had a rule about drinking, well I didn't have a rule about eating chocolate. Even though it is a food group and has many health benefits, apparently you can eat too much of it.



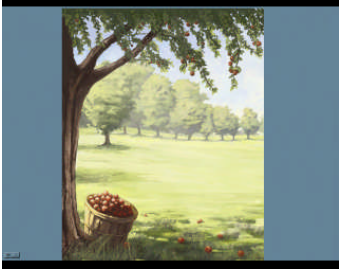
Or if it wasn't the chocolate, the weight could be because I've slowed down a little. I'm not in such a hurry to get to the next page of my life. The old wise man in *Cheetah Girls: One World* says that the point of time is to help you understand where you are, not to make you rush to the next place. And every once in a while I meet someone who confirms that I'm right where I'm supposed to be.



It also could be that my heart grew heavier. Kahlil Gibran writes: "When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy. When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight." My heart grew deeper, filled with sorrow, yes, but also abundant joy.

Everything has more meaning now. There's so much to look at, listen to, laugh about.

So much to love, eat, and hug.



A few summers ago, I took some time to reflect on my childhood. One of the memories that came to mind was the summers I spent with my aunts and uncles and cousins on my grandmother's screen porch cutting up apples. My grandmother used to make all the cousins pick up the rotten apples from her yard and then we spent hours and hours on her porch talking and cutting up those tiny hard bruised apples. It wasn't until I was an adult that I understood how smart my grandmother was – all those years she kept us coming back to her porch each summer. That memory became a scene in my children's novel. All the cousins remember it. I'd like to read a portion of it to you.

The narrator is 10-year-old Andy Parker who's spending the summer at grandma's house. He's on the porch with his mom, aunts and grandma and his mom's childhood friend, John, cutting up the apples he picked up from the yard.

“Grandma?” I asked. “Why don’t you just pick the good apples from the tree instead of cutting up these rotten ones?”

Everyone stared at me like it was the dumbest question ever asked.

“These are baking apples, Andy,” she said. “There’s lots of good apple in that bucket and when it’s all baked up, you don’t know what the apple looked like when it started out.”

I looked at my bucket of tiny, hard apples full of bruises and worm holes. Two large paper bags overflowed with the skins and rotten apple pieces. After an hour of all of us cutting, there was barely half a pan full of good apple pieces for baking.

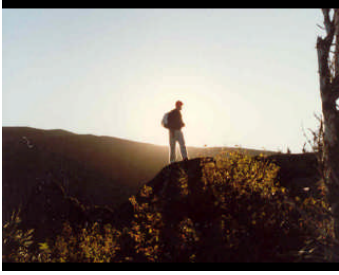
I still didn’t get it. It seemed like a whole lot of work for just a few apples.

John got up to get another bag for the compost. He leaned over and whispered in my ear, “It’s not about the apples, sport.”

I looked at Mom. She was holding her side as she laughed. Grandma and all the aunts and sisters and cousins were telling old stories, poking fun at new ideas, and leaning and elbowing and laughing, all while paring their rotten apples and saving the sliver of any good they found.

God has blessed me in each chapter, each season of my life. Each day I am thankful for the sliver of good I find. I pray that you will feel God’s grace and blessing wherever you are in your journey, too. Remember that God’s promise isn’t that bad things won’t happen to us, it’s that he’ll be here with us when they do. He’ll be in bird baths, snowflakes, a song, a friend’s hug, and all those other little moments of the day.





Take a moment to look at the women around you. We are all at the base of this mountain, praying in different churches, following different paths, facing different challenges on our journey. Some of us will climb the north face, some will take the south. Some will tackle rock cliffs, others will hike through long valleys. But when we reach the top, we'll all be in the same place with the same God. So let's take this opportunity Resurrection Lutheran has given us to meet and be inspired by other women in our community. Let's live our faith in mornings with our children, interactions with our coworkers, kindness to a stranger, and celebrations with those we love most. Let's be there for each other with a voice of encouragement, a helping hand, and a reminder to laugh each day, to love with all our hearts, and to live each and every moment.



For as we look back on this journey, we'll realize that it's not just the handful of times we fell, it's not the days when bad things happened or we thought we lost our way. Those aren't the moments that define who we are and what we believe.



It's all the moments in between.

God bless.