

Dear Family and Friends:

Enter the term “heaven” in some browser online and you will likely bring up sites to rock groups, you tube music videos, or seedy nightclubs. The term often describes an extraordinary or unusual earthly experience. Our culture could never be accused of being so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good. Indeed, the concept of heaven that is not framed by the earth is difficult to locate on our collective radar screen.

This year was a bookends year in life experiences for us with heaven being front and center. On one end was the joy of new life, the healthy birth of twins, Caleb and Eliana, to our daughter-in-law Stephanie and our son Jeremy. The summer started in pure joy with the twins' arrival on June 26. Fresh scrubbed from heaven, they are a delight at every level, except for the distance. Would that they be across the street in Maryland instead of across the ocean in Austria.

On the other end was the sudden and unexpected passing of RV's youngest brother, Frank, in September. August flew by during a series of trips to our family's home in western New York as the seriousness of Frank's condition took hold. The gathering around Frank's bed in hospice care will be forever seared in our minds. We are so very thankful for the opportunity to speak of making our peace with God, of reflecting on His mercy and love, of gratitude for our time together as family. The hope of heaven tempered our sorrow.

O Love that will not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give thee back the life I owe,
That in thy ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.
O Joy that seeks me through the pain,
I cannot close my heart to thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not in vain
That morn shall tearless be.

Visits to Rhode Island with Chris and Jessi and their children, Tyler and Kara, populated our spring and fall—always a joy. So many reasons to pause and give thanks. Reunions with long-time friends from a special Sunday School class in Rochester, New York, and from a graduating class in Dottie's past reminded us of both the joy of being with kindred spirits and the reality of the passage of time.

This Christmas, we bring our bookends' experience to the manger. The poignant evidence of our life's flow draws us to the child. God is from everlasting to everlasting. We are creatures of time. We see things in terms of transitions, change points, starts and stops. But he see things seamlessly, in the eternal now. He is El Roi, the God who sees all and fits all into His purpose.

And could this really be His purpose? This tiny newborn child—whose birthing cries from an animal's feeding trough ride the wings of the wind—could he really be the Creator and majestic Lord of all? The Alpha and the Omega, the promise of the ages, the restorer of our souls—could he really be one and same with this humble babe? Could the Eternal One die a despised criminal's death that we may live eternally? Could that death break the endless cycle of sin and death, sickness and disease, and roll back the curse under which all creation groans? Could a God-authored utopia really be the end game?

Surrounded by your glory
What will my heart feel
Will I dance for you, Jesus
Or in awe of You be still
Will I stand in your presence
Or to my knees will I fall
Will I sing hallelujah
Will I be able to speak at all
I can only imagine

Indeed, this child is the long anticipated one. One bookend was the Cross for unworthy recipients such as me. "He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be the righteousness of God in Him." The other bookend is the Crown. "For this reason, God also highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of the Father." And with the Crown, a shared glory, and a redeemed and healed reality for such as us. What condensation, what mercy, what redemptive love!

May this Yuletide be a hallowed one for you and yours. May He invade your presence and holiday cadence with a sense of His presence and peace. From our home to yours, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.