



THE LORD GIVES, AND THE LORD TAKES AWAY

The English poet Christina Rossetti captured the dreary winter landscape well when she wrote, “In the bleak mid-winter, frosty wind made moan; earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone; snow had fallen, snow on snow; In the bleak mid-winter, long ago.” This and the rest of her poem later became the Christmas carol “In the Bleak Mid-winter”, with that dreary landscape as the backdrop into which Jesus, the Light of the world, was born.

We have our own bleak mid-winter in Western North Carolina. Trees appear lifeless, as the landscape slumbers in shades of brown and grey. And so, it is lovely to have orchids blooming in our cottage. Even my less-than-green thumb can keep an orchid plant blooming for a couple of months, so we can enjoy its exotic beauty and splash of color against the somber winter scenery.

Yet, the orchids eventually lose their beautiful blossoms, one by one. The first flower begins to fade and wither, then its stem shrivels, and it appears completely spent. Devoid of its former glory and no longer serving the purpose of beautifying our home, it even seems to detract from the rest of the flowers still looking fresh on the plant. And yet, the waning flower clings to the stem, resisting my attempt to tidy things up by plucking it off prematurely. I yield; it will drop in its own time.

How much more should we accept the natural lifespan of a human being created in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27), and not cut it off prematurely? And yet, a movement is afoot to hasten the death of those who, like the fading orchid blossom, are no longer vibrant, seem to be serving no further purpose, are subjectively deemed to detract from the vitality of a family or community, and appear to be near the end.

This is known as Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD), the practice of prescribing lethal medication to be self-administered by a person who falls under certain, ever-widening criteria. It is legal in several countries including our own, in several states and the District of Columbia. Proponents regard it as a compassionate end to suffering, “death with dignity.” But this is not the authentic compassion, divine order, or human dignity we see in the Bible.

There we see that it is solely our Creator’s prerogative to give us life, and to let it end, e.g., “all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be” (Psalm 139:16); “A person’s days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed” (Job 14:5); “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21).

Our very human urge to control our own destiny does not override the sovereignty of God, despite the cultural push to do every aspect of life and death “my way.” Medical advances can help us contend with disease and pain, but they are rightly used to support and ease life, not to end it.

In the New Testament, we see what authentic compassion is, as Jesus continually heals the sick, forgives sin, and raises the dead. Nowhere does his divine love and human empathy for those who are suffering lead Him to hasten their death. He continually gives people life and hope, instead of taking it away as the MAiD movement does.

Meghan Schrader, a woman who struggles to meet the challenges of her autism and helps others contend with their disabilities as well, noted that MAiD/assisted suicide offers false compassion and destroys hope by implying that an ill or disabled person is really better off dead. This is the antithesis of Jesus’ stated purpose, applicable to all people: “I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly”, unlike those who come “only to steal and kill and destroy” (John 10:10).

May we cherish and support that abundant life, to its natural end, and help others do the same: “Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all of our days” (Psalm 90:14).

With love in the Lord,
The Rev. Christine Maddux