

St. Matthew Newsletter

Our Vision: Connecting the world with Jesus Christ

Our Mission: Faithfully living as the Body of Christ, and sharing the Gospel that brings salvation

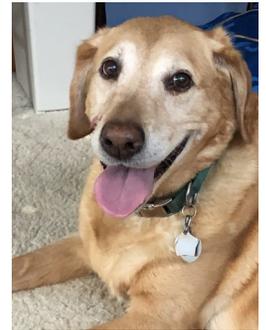
❖ Pastor's Message

Rev. Craig Otto

A Dog's Life

What lay behind, what lies ahead? You can't help but ask these questions when a sudden change occurs in your life. The loss of our beloved dog, Casie, is only one event in the course of a day, but it causes me to reflect on a season of life that is no more.

I remember it like yesterday—taking our daughter, Emma, to choose a dog as a present for her eleventh birthday. We went to a home in Lee's Summit where the family had a half-dozen yellow Labradors for sale. Our son and daughter played with them in the backyard. The one Emma liked best had a peak on its head and droopy ears, nicknamed *Hounddog* by its breeders. Emma called her *Casie*.



Now in our 50's, Becky and I look back on those halcyon days. What things have passed these 13 years! Our children attended Lutheran schools with faithful teachers, did class work, piano lessons, band concerts, sports practices, reading programs, spelling bees, recesses, chapel services, and carpooling—all for a season, but now in our rear-view mirror.



Our family-of-four melded with the rest of our family during the season of Casie. The children bonded with grandparents, built relationships with aunts and uncles, teased and were teased by cousins, and learned they were significant in this family. Weekly worship, midweek and confirmation, being challenged to make this baptismal faith their own... these things are memories of a time now past.

We worked through issues and dramas at home, school, and in this scary world. Relationships prospered and died out. Tears and fears and prayers were the food of mother and father and daughter and son, all for good reason and all real suffering.

We lowered our heads and ran into the wind, asking ourselves how long we could endure a race in which we labored day after day barely moving forward.

Casie was our floppy-eared catharsis in those years. We loved it when she spun like psycho-dog then ran through the house and back to us, away again and back, inviting us to play her dog games. She nosed the curtains aside summer mornings to watch the kids walk down the driveway to swim practice. We shared chores of feeding and care and our evenings were peppered by thoughts of *We need to get home for Casie*. Emma took her for walks. Vince sat stroking her fur in the hallway. The dog looked up at us with baleful eyes, head resting on paws, for us to love.

As Becky and I look back during this time of mourning, we can't really say we have figured out life. Our children were raised by parents who didn't know how to raise children but prayed their way through it. The choices we made about investing our time were probably in the ballpark, but we confess we haven't followed a master plan. We learned how to parent believing *what we did today mattered for them tomorrow*.

Our children saw us read the Bible and pray in the mornings. We read devotions out loud to them after dinner or while waiting together for rides. We listened to questions



and shared what we learned from God's Word, a faith deeply shaped by knowing we belong to Jesus. We prayed the Lord's Prayer and reminded them they are God's children because they are baptized and love the Lord. We let the Ten Commandments be our guide for instructing our children, and let the story of Jesus—as spoken in the Creed—be a living conversation in our home. **The threads we wove regarding faith in Jesus now seem like the only ones that hold us together for eternity.**

Beloved dogs pass away and the house in which we raised our children may one day have new keepers. Our jobs are here but aren't core of who we are, loved ones die or move away, and our dwelling may hardly resemble what it once was when we lived there. It's like going back to your home place and the first thought upon seeing it is, "I remember when..." **Now that Casie is gone, it seems like there are ghosts who could tell the story of what we saw and felt here.**



Sharing the news of Casie's death with our children was a dose of truth—as *they* comforted *us*—rather than us being strong for them. Now as they bond with others and live apart from us, we let go and give thanks they are connected with Jesus. They call upon Him in prayer, trusting the same Jesus who heard them during the not-so-halcyon days growing up.

The seed of faith passed on through baptism, in which the Holy Spirit came upon them, was watered with each hymn, sermon and prayer—even our sputtering attempts at giving counsel and encouragement. Those sapling children are now sturdy oaks. They bend in the wind, to be sure, and the weather of suffering and attack will break branches and cause damage even in their adult seasons of life. **Yet they are not a planting of their mother and father only here for a time and gone—but our children are a planting of the Lord.** To our amazement and praise, righteousness springs forth.

An Old Testament truth I understand better each passing year is written in Isaiah: "All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

If life was just for here on earth, we would surely be disappointed that suffering and the death of all things wins the upper hand. **Yet there is hope when one takes his eyes off of this world and lifts them toward Jesus.** Our faith isn't in working toward a world where people understand one another, nor is our faith in a personal journey to find contentment; neither is achievable. Rather, our faith is in a person.

Christ Jesus, risen from the abyss of death, stood among disciples who had been reeling in sorrow since they witnessed Him crucified. Now He who was dead and entombed is alive three days later. They laughed in comic, tear-filled happiness. They touched Him, embraced Him, holding on tight—you know how this is—as if they feared letting go of Him. The Lord reassured them, **"In me you may have peace; in the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."**



A dog's life made ours better. Poor, dear Casie was needy, silly, afraid, curious, hungry, sensitive, happy, and enjoyed chasing rabbits. I miss her. But I count it a blessing our family learned to love each other and trust in Christ while she was with us. What will fade and what will last? Christ made all things and in Him all things hold together, so in prayer we commend our family into Jesus' care... for now and eternity.

Yours in Christ, Pastor Otto