

There are times when life makes no sense. You go along and you think you have things figured out: Do good, avoid evil, maintain good health, exercise, set goals for yourself, help other people, have faith. If you do those things, you get good results. But then you face something like this. We know tragedy can happen, but we just cannot understand it. The irony is that Karen Kemper devoted her life to helping people understand things. She was a teacher – a good one. She enjoyed watching young people learn things, and shaping their minds toward a better future. She loved to teach, and she loved the kids.

In the gospels “Teacher” is how the disciples address Jesus. “Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.” “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment?” After the resurrection, when Mary Magdalene realizes that the person she sees is no gardener, but Jesus himself, she calls him, “Rabbouni,” and the evangelist explains what that word means. Teacher. When you aspire to be a teacher, you aspire to be like Christ.

Karen wanted more. She wanted to be a principal, so she did what every good teacher does: she studied. Karen lived a short life, but it was crammed with more ideals, values, goals and accomplishments than many of us would achieve if we live twice as many years.

This is the point of the first reading from the book of Wisdom. It wrestles with the question of good people who die young. Wisdom says, “the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time, nor can it be measured in terms of years.” In those days, people regarded white hair as a kind of crown. But Wisdom says hair color is not your crown; understanding is your crown, and some people get it when they’re young; a clean life has all the virtue of old age. To the Book of Wisdom, the death of good young people is God’s desire to protect them from the evils of this world, and to let them live forever in pure light. As Bill told me the other day, “God must need a principal in heaven.” That’s the idea.

This is our comfort. Karen spent her life teaching people, and she taught us again in her last days. She did everything she could to save her life; so did her family; so did her doctors. She made very specific plans in case the worst happened. She wanted to be an organ and tissue donor, and her family supported her 100%. As a result, this week Karen Kemper is providing life and health for up to 60 people. Into a short life span, Karen crammed all the love and service she could possibly fit. She would rather be here physically to help her husband, her children, her family, and her students. But she is still helping them; she is helping all of us know how to act when life hands you the most difficult news you could possibly face. In God’s mysterious plan, we will learn more important lessons from Karen’s life than we might ever have learned had she lived to be 100.

Jesus said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith also in me. In my Father’s house, there are many dwelling places.” In times of confusion, we need some teacher to show us the way. Jesus said, “I am the way.” He will guide and direct the

**questioning hearts that seek to know the truth that lies beyond what we can comprehend. If we follow Christ, he will teach us.**