

Maybe he was making up for the day he set fire to the chicken coop when he was 4 years old, but throughout his life Les Foster liked to build things. He was a machinist, and he never met a tool he didn't like. He served in the Air Force and the fire department. He performed odd jobs at home and at church. Les met his future bride at work when she was still a teenager. He taught their kids practical things – like how to use tools. He fixed up the house in Kidder and was designing a new one in southern Missouri. People thought he was a loner, but he liked to square dance. He seemed quiet and easy-going, but he had a temper. At St. Munchin we saw him fixing up the grounds outside the church more than we saw him inside the church, but it would be hard for me to name a man with a stronger faith in God than Les Foster. In our last conversations, he told me he wasn't the best of God's children, but he hoped he wasn't among the worst. I think Les will be pleasantly surprised at what awaits him, just as he was by the affection he received over the past few months. We all discovered what a good man he was, and what it takes to build a life of love and faith.

The book of Wisdom says the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. A fool thinks they are dead and that their passing away is an affliction. But fools are wrong. The souls of the just are in peace. It's hard to see people we love suffer. But Wisdom says God proves them like gold in the furnace, and he takes them to himself like incense. God's mercy and care extend even to those who suffer.

This message warmed the disciples at the Last Supper. Jesus was about to undergo his suffering, but he ministered first to the suffering of those he loved. "Do not let your hearts be troubled," he said. "Have faith in me." And when Thomas asked how on earth they were going to follow him, Jesus said, "I am the way."

Our lives are filled with plans and dreams. We think we know the way to them. We have learned how to live, what skills to develop, and what people to choose as companions. But at times we face a road we did not plan for and a future we did not see. Those are times of great loss. Our hopes and dreams fade. In reality, though, they are taking on a new shape. The biggest of our plans always remain intact: loving God and our neighbor, giving thanks for the gift of life, serving others. God may take those plans and shape them in a different way, like a machinist who knows what you want, but can make a better shape to get you there.

Building a house in southern Missouri became a symbol of the future for Les. But he was always hoping for something more – a permanent home, one that other hands had built, one that he hoped he was worthy to enter. "In my Father's house," Jesus says, "there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?" Living in faith means following the way of Christ, being ready to adjust our plans to fit what God has in mind. We gather in sorrow today on a path we'd rather not take, but we trust that Christ will be there at the end of our journey to welcome us into the home of our dreams.