

Just before Lent began this year my cousin Steve died. He and I were born the same year. He grew up in Minnesota; I grew up in Kansas City. We didn't visit very often, but I always felt he was my cousin more than anyone else's because of our age. The year we graduated from eighth grade we enrolled at two different high school seminaries. The summer before our senior year, Steve complained to his parents about headaches and double vision. They had him tested, and he was diagnosed with a brain tumor. Surgeons at Mao Clinic saved his life, but he left the operating room disabled. Steve's legs didn't work any more. He lost precise control of his hands and arms. His speech was slurred, and it became hard to understand him. At the age of 17 he went from a carefree summer to life in a wheel chair. Steve finished high school and college; he lived on his own; and he became a lobbyist for the disabled. When a historic carousel was restored for a city park in St. Paul, he insisted on a ramp for wheelchairs and a place he could strap in for the ride. He got his wish. One day he decided to ride in a hot air balloon. He explained things to the pilot and signed forms releasing him from liability. So, Steve took a bus out to a field and met the guy with the balloon. This man helped Steve up from his chair and into the basket, where Steve held himself up on the ropes. The guy told him that landing can be a little rough. Steve said, "Don't worry about me. I know how to fall." Steve had one glorious day when his chair was on the ground and he was in the air. He moved to Kansas City about 10 years ago, and he's come to all our family gatherings. This will be our first Easter without him; two months ago he got pneumonia, and his system had become so compromised that he lost his life after a few days in the hospital. Steve taught me to look beyond what you see. A lot of people looked at him, saw his legs didn't work, and his mouth didn't work, and they thought his mind didn't work either. But it did. It worked very well.

On the first Easter, the women who got to the tomb couldn't wait to tell everyone what they saw. Others thought Jesus was dead and gone. After all, his legs didn't work, his mouth didn't work, and his heart didn't work. But Jesus was the Son of God; he knew how to fall and how to die. The women were searching for the living one among the dead, but he was not there. The story seemed like nonsense, but it was the truth.

We do not always see life where we should. We do not always see Christ in those who are disabled, those who are less skilled, less bright, less handsome, less beautiful, those who weigh too much, who don't dress right or don't speak right. We treat many people as though they were dead, and we think it nonsense that they might contribute something to society and church, but they can and they do.

This Lent we have become more aware of our sins, our weaknesses, and our need for a savior. That savior is here; he is risen. And he raises us up in spite of our sins and our inabilities. Today let us praise God with whatever we have. It may not be the way someone else praises God, but it is the way we are able. That is the new life we celebrate at Easter.