

## The Empty Chair

The holidays are past, and we are returning to our usual and normal activities. As normal as anything can be in this age of Covid. My Son and Daughter-in-law and Grandson and Granddaughter in-law came over for dinner on Christmas Eve Day. The Dining Room Table seats six without extensions and 10 to 12 with extensions. I had the table set for five with six chairs. This left one seat unoccupied. It was painful to see that empty chair, but I have become used to seeing empty seats. The evening my brother died I was setting the table and insisted that a place had to be set for Bill. I wrapped a shirt around the chair and set the dinnerware. We were unaware that he was dying at that time. The telegram came that night around midnight that he was extremely ill. We received another telegram 2 days later that he was gone. Things were not instant like they are now, and he was in the Army and stationed in Panama. He had died on Monday, and we did not know until Wednesday. After that I always felt that empty seat at the table. As time went on, I always felt that tug at my heart for Bill and for the rest of my family that has passed and when we have a large meal with family gathered, I miss them. My brothers were my rock during a tumultuous childhood. The empty seat this time was for my husband although there were others on my mind as well. I miss them.

John 11:33-35 When Jesus saw Mary weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled; "Where have you laid him?" he asked. "Come and see Lord," they replied. Jesus wept.

"Jesus wept." The shortest and yet one of the most profound verses in the Bible. Jesus wept at death and so do we. We see the empty chair and it tugs at our hearts. It is a wound that opens again and again. It is a slow healing wound that is only closed by the memories of love, of many Christmases, of a life shared, of thousands of meals prepared and taken together. I thank God for those who have left me and for their place in my heart and in my life and for the love they left me.

Lord, thank you for the gift of grieving, for the gift of loving. Please be with those who are ill and those who grieve. Give them wellness and healed hearts. Be with our Pastor, bless his ministry and bless his family. Be with our Staff and Leaders. Guide them and protect them. Be with our church, may it be your church and may we reflect your teachings and your love. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Grace Epperson