

## From the Pastor

Below is my description of the most memorable pastoral visit I have ever made. I use this in the book I have just finished and hope will be published. I use it to describe what happens to a person when, by the Holy Spirit, we find our will coming into agreement with the will of God and the will of the Son of God.

I made a pastoral call on a woman named Marie Odden one snowy afternoon in the middle of December. I had started as the interim pastor at a church on the east side of St. Paul, Minnesota, in an old, working class neighborhood, and had asked a handful of that church's members to draw up a list of shut-ins I should visit. As the group was going through their list with me, we came to Mrs. Odden's name. "She's a retired grade school teacher. She's got to be well into her nineties," they informed me, with one of them adding that his son, now middle aged with grown kids of his own, had her in whatever grade. "You will love visiting with Mrs. Odden," they all agreed.

I was invited into Mrs. Odden's modest home there on St. Paul's east side by her caretaker. I noticed, as I walked through her living room and toward the kitchen, dozens of Christmas cards hanging by the fold from strings stretched across and thumbtacked at both ends to the walls. I then sat down at Mrs. Odden's kitchen table. She was sitting across from me. After we had exchanged a few pleasantries, she abruptly asked, "What do you think of the world?"

And my first thought was, "Oh no. Here we go again." I was afraid that I was in for another one of those harangues about the way things are these days, how things aren't like they were back in the good old days, back when things were better and people were decent. Well, I wasn't sure what I should say, so I braced myself for what I was sure was coming and asked her what she thought, what she thought about the world.

I remember her setting the point of her right elbow on the kitchen table and holding her brow in her right hand. She paused and then, looking at me from behind her wrist, she solemnly declared, "I love it. I just love the world." She looked down at the table in front her for a moment and then back up at me, her right hand falling to grasp her left wrist, her eyes large behind the thick lenses of her glasses. "And the dirtiest and the orneriest, I think I love them most of all," she exclaimed.

She said that, and I remember her eyes growing even larger, as if she could see them yet, the dirtiest and the orneriest of her many students, those whom she loved most of all. I am sure she could see them still; in her mind's eye could she see them yet. "Do you understand? Do you understand what I am saying?" she asked with not a little bit of urgency in her voice. I remember being thrown off my game not a little bit and taking a moment to collect myself and my thoughts. "Yes. I think I do," I answered.

About a half an hour later, my visit with her complete, I was in her living room putting on my hat, jacket, and gloves. She was still back in the kitchen, still sitting at the table and drinking her tea. As I was thus preparing myself to go back out into the snow, I found myself looking at all of those Christmas cards. "Most of them are from former students of hers," said her caretaker quietly, as though she were a docent at an art museum. I felt that I had made less of a pastoral call that afternoon and more of a pilgrimage to some ancient oracle.

Pastor Neal