



Helen (1/2/1923 - 2/13/2008) and Harold Lehse (2/25/1924 - 8/6/2007)

Devotional from Helen's Memorial Service:

The Shadow of a Butterfly

A meditation delivered at the memorial service for Helen Lehse

Covenant Village, Golden Valley, Minnesota

February 22, 2008

by The Reverend Dr. Michael A. Halleen

People brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. (Acts 5:15 –NIV)

Love is patient, love is kind . . . Love never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-8 –NIV)

There was (and is) a belief in some Eastern cultures that a person's shadow, if falls it on you, touches you with the influence of the spirit of that person. So people in the early days of Church, seeking healing and power, placed themselves in positions where the shadow of Peter and the other apostles might fall on them. They believed that influence would bring them health and a renewed spirit, as these followers of Christ surely had.

So it is said that people from villages in India would maneuver themselves to a place where Mahatma Gandhi's shadow might fall on them as he passed by, thereby bringing them blessing. At the same time, they would carefully avoid any possibility that their own shadows might touch him and thereby depreciate his noble presence.

We don't share the superstition that a shadow literally represents the good or ill that a person brings into this world. But it is worth considering that each of us does cast a shadow of some kind. We do have an influence – some are better for having had us draw near, some may be worse.

We come to offer tribute to the memory of Helen Lehse, to consider the influence of her shadow upon the lives of those she loved, upon those who fell under her care, indeed upon the world itself. She passed through our village, and her shadow, as lightly as that of a butterfly, touched many here.

The Apostle John tells us that "God is love," and we follow God's ways by ourselves being people of love. If we say we love God but don't love one another, we are not following God at all. The New Testament is very clear about this: love is not a feeling but a way of acting. Paul describes that way of living in 1 Corinthians. 13, a chapter we sometimes mistakenly put only into the context of romantic love. But it is much more than that, much deeper and wider. We shall take a few moments to reflect on what the Apostle says there about what love looks like and consider in that light how the shadow of Helen Lehse touched our lives.

Love is patient and kind. Helen was raised in a strict Norwegian home, one of nine children, helping no doubt to care for her younger siblings in the years of the Great Depression. We saw the shadow of patience and kindness nurtured in that home as she touched our lives in later years.

Love is not envious, boastful, or proud. I daresay there is not a person in this room who ever noticed the slightest trace of any of those traits as the silent,

slight butterfly shadow of Helen Lehse touched upon the window of our souls. She would never speak of her achievements, but she was totally supportive of her children and immensely proud of her grandchildren in theirs.

Love is not rude or self-seeking, not easily angered, and keeps no record of wrongs. Dawn, her daughter, tells a wonderful story about the last prayer Helen prayed. She was having a difficult time in the hospital. It was hard for her to breathe, and she wanted quiet and rest. In truth, she wanted to die. Dawn, in her way, was talking and encouraging – all the things you would want a daughter to do. Finally Helen said, "Just leave!" Dawn did, feelings hurt, and returned some minutes later, obviously having been crying. Helen's food tray had been delivered, and Helen prayed her familiar table grace: *Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest, and let these gifts to us be blessed...and forgive me for hurting Dawn's feelings. Amen.* That is a butterfly wrapping its gentle wings around a daughter. It is the very meaning of "keeps no record of wrongs," the very meaning of love.

Love rejoices with the truth. Always Helen's joy rested in the goodness of God, in the salvation that is in Christ. The several Bible passages she had made note of spoke consistently of God's goodness and care, the shadow of her butterfly protected by the Creator of all things good.

Love always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres. It surprised me to learn how hard Helen had worked throughout her life. Not a stay-at-home mom, she had worked to help support her family, whether helping in the school cafeteria or as a playground attendant or her job at Pearson's Candy (the kids didn't mind the benefits of that job). Butterflies fool you – they seem so light, so frail – but no creature on earth has worked any harder just to be born. The beauty of those wings and the treasure they are to us have come at a price.

Love never fails. What Paul meant was that love is consistent. Love never falls short of being what it is and doing what it does – patience, kindness, trust and hope. All else fails – piety falls short, promises are broken, education takes us just so far, mountains wear away, seas run dry – but love never fails. Love keeps on giving, keeps on offering kindness, keeps on speaking truth to the beloved.

God is love. Today Helen Lehse has been drawn fully into that love. While she was among us, she practiced it well. That spirit was known, seen wherever her shadow touched the floor. Her daughters will tell you there was never a day that they didn't know they were loved – not by hugs and kisses (they too pass away) – but by the kindness, patience, trust and perseverance their mother showed them.

Helen loved butterflies. Next time you see a graceful fluttering outside your window or among flowers of your garden, think not of Helen (she would not want so to be remembered) but of love – think of the tender shadow your life casts upon others. *"I have a little shadow that goes in and out with me,"* Stevenson wrote in his poetry for children. We cannot know all those upon whom our shadow may fall, but whoever – and wherever – that may be, may it be the same kind of patience, kindness, trust and hope that we saw in the shadow of a butterfly that was Helen Lehse. Amen.

Devotional From Harold's Memorial Service

On My Best Day

A meditation delivered at the memorial service for Harold J. Lehse

Brookdale Covenant Church, Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

August 10, 2007

by The Reverend Dr. Michael A. Halleen

In your heart, set apart Christ as Lord. (1 Peter 3:15 –NIV)

The gospel singer Glenn Young used say whenever he received a compliment for his singing, "On my best day I'm still just a sinner saved by grace." Those are the words of man who in his heart had set apart Christ as Lord. I want to reflect with you for a few moments on the life of Harold Lehse, another such person—a man who had set apart Christ as Lord in his heart.

Harold Lehse had a lot of good days, days that were a blessing to him and to those he loved. Let's recall a few of them.

Harold had a good day the day he rode the train from Minneapolis to Menasha, Minnesota to help out on the family farm. He sat across the aisle from a young woman he later described as "very fair to the eye" and offered to share some magazines he had brought along. He had to be persistent because she was shy and cautious, but he managed to get her name and learn she lived in Osakis. By the time the train reached the place where she was getting off, he had gotten permission to write to her, just "to see if she got home okay."

That was good day, Harold. Yes, he would have said, *but in my heart I have set apart Christ as Lord. So on my best day I'm still just a sinner saved by grace.*

Harold had a good day too the day he told that young woman (Helen was her name) that he loved her. She said she loved him too, but there was someone she loved more. He said it felt like he had been kicked in the stomach by one of the horses on his farm. But he had to know who his competition was. She said it was Jesus. "I love you, Harold, but I love Jesus more."

This led him to start to go to church with her and her family whenever he visited her in Osakis. One night in that church, in an evangelistic meeting, he fell under conviction, and with the help of a kindly pastor and through many tears, Harold gave heart to Christ, "setting him apart as Lord" in his heart. The following night at the church Harold was asked to give his testimony, and a number of other young people also became believers.

That was a good day, Harold. Yes, *but on my best day I'm still just a sinner saved by grace.*

Harold had a good day the day he and Helen were married, Aug. 27, 1950—57 years ago this month. Every day of that time was a day when in his heart Christ was set apart as Lord.

Harold had good days when he brought the family to the root beer stand for a casual meal, taking a sip from each mug as he passed it to one of the kids in the back seat. He had good days when he simply listened to his children's complaints and worries, listened to their fears about life and about the future. He had good days when he enjoyed a meal one of his daughters lovingly cooked for him. He had good days when he took his grandsons fishing and let them drive the boat. He had good days—many of them—when he would say to Helen that he loved her, hearing her say in return, "Love you more."

Those were good days, Harold. Yes, *but on my best day I'm still just a sinner saved by grace.*

Harold had a good day on that day he appeared at the door of the woodworking shop of Covenant Village. He was a new resident at the Village and not in best of health. A humble man, he approached tentatively, not sure there would be a place for him, not sure he would be welcomed. What he found was a great fellowship of men as passionate about woodworking as he was and as enthusiastic about working with their hands as he. Soon he had a place among them, a place by the window. Then he became a regular among them, an acknowledged leader of the group, one who welcomed and encouraged others. Many of his woodworking colleagues are here today and would testify to the positive influence he was to them, their efforts and their fellowship.

That's a good day, Harold. *Yes, but only because in my heart I set apart Christ as Lord. On my best day I'm still just sinner saved by grace.*

Harold had a good day (and this may seem a strange thing to say) on the day he died there at North Memorial. It was a good day because he was surrounded by his family—his beloved Helen, the three children and five grandchildren. He had managed to bring them together from their busy lives where they could share their last words to him—thoughts of kindness, words of thanks, memories of love.

That's a good day, Harold, a good way to die. *Yes, but on my best day I'm still just a sinner saved by grace. It was only because in my heart I had set apart Christ as Lord. Tell them about that grace, Pastor! Tell them about that Christ!*

So in Harold Lehse's memory I share with you the truth of the good news of Jesus Christ. It's summed up in words of John in his first letter: *This is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. (1 John 5:11, 12)* This is the testimony, now Harold's testimony to you.

The truth is this—God made you. God loves you. Jesus died for you. When you die, you will go to God. You will go to God because there is nowhere else to go. If you go to the top of the mountain or the bottom of sea, God is there. If you go the highest heaven or the deepest hell, God is there. And when you meet God, the question will not be if you were good or bad, Protestant or Catholic, conservative or liberal. The only thing that will matter is that life—the life that is in his Son, for *He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.*

Let the memory of Harold Lehse be this: that here was a man who in his heart set apart Christ as Lord. Here was a person who enjoyed many good days—but on his best day was still just a sinner, saved by grace. Amen.