

Candy, on behalf of myself and the faith community here at St. Jude, I wish to extend my deepest and sincerest sympathies on the loss of your husband, John.

For many years, you formed a great partnership --- based on love that was patient, and kind – that hoped all things, and endured all things.

John loved you.

You loved him more.

And he loved you most.

Many say that John met his match in you. But all was well in John's life – because he did have you in his life. And nobody could have had a better care-taker than you in these last 9 months. So yes, as you said, it must feel like someone has reached into your chest and pulled your heart out. And so receive our words of comfort and support – as you go through these next few days and weeks and months.

You know quite well – you will never “get over this” – but God will see you through it. To Cindy and Richard – those who called John, Dad --- to Sheri and Julie who called John, step-dad – to your spouses and children and grandchildren --- what a hole you now have in your lives which was once filled by John. Know of our prayers and support for you as you mourn his loss.

Sister Melannie Svoboda, in her book Rummaging For God, says that if it were up to her, she would add an eleventh commandment to the original ten – and that commandment would be: Thou shalt lighten up! Because, she thinks, it is getting harder to hang on to our sense of humor with all that goes on in the world on any given day. So, she attempts to lighten her readers up by saying: A little girl said to her father after Sunday school: “our teacher must be Jesus’ grandmother ‘cause she talks about him *all the time!*”

“On cable they have a weather channel with 24 hours of weather. We had something like that when I was growing up. We called it a window!”

“Always borrow from pessimists: they never expect anything back anyway.”

“A sign in a veterinarian’s office read: The doctor is in. Sit. Stay.”

And “Middle age is when your knees buckle and your belt doesn’t”

John would want us to laugh today as he would agree with the statement: “the day on which one has not laughed is one most surely wasted.” Laughter is one of the things John promoted in life. As well as a profound sense of hospitality: he would want you to sit, visit, drink a beer, and tell a few stories. And when it was time to go – he would want you to stay and have just one more – I assume both a beer and a story.

Someone once described going to the farm was kind of like the Twilight Zone – you entered and did not get to leave!

John was far from pessimistic – he always had something positive to say --- and was filled with gratitude – mostly for what you brought to his life, Candy.

These were some of the many things that made John who he was – and why everybody who met him liked him, and enjoyed his company. Which also played into his success of being a salesman and distributor for American Tobacco for 23 years – people just liked him! John loved the farm – even though he didn’t know much about farming when he retired and you moved to the farm. It was always a learning experience for him – as well as hard work. When asked why he bothered to retire if he was going to work as hard as he did on the farm – he responded that it’s not work – if you can stop anytime you want! And so there developed a leisurely approach to chores --- work awhile, and relax for a while --- a couple of posts put in the ground – then maybe it’s time for a beer. . .

Years ago when I was in seminary – there was a sign in the recreation room that read: “In heaven, there ain’t no beer. So we have to drink it here.” And we did – and John did, too. And there was always time throughout life –and especially on the farm ---for fishing.

You often hear the story about mountain climbers being asked – why they climb mountains. . . responding: because it is there. John felt that way about fishing – why did he do it – because the pond was there!

I chose the Gospel reading I did – in part because of Peter saying quite bluntly: I am going fishing! I wonder how many times John said that in life? And although John may not have caught 153 fish as the Apostles did – it is a well-known fact that nobody can ever recall a time that they went fishing with John – that John did not catch a fish! And why did he do it – well, yes, because there was a pond – but also wasn’t it for just the relaxation – or the quality time he got to spend with people – especially grandchildren – all of whom he adored --- just sitting and fishing and enjoying the day.

In part, it was also out of good stewardship – caring for his little piece of creation that God entrusted to him – because quite often it was catch and release for John. . .But also wasn’t it in part because in that quiet and calm of being near the water – just like Peter and the other Apostles – John was able to find the Lord – and be refreshed and renewed by him --- because we never know in life just where the Lord is going to show up!

Knowing of John's last few minutes on this earth – because Candy told me about them --- got me to speculate a little this week about whether or not our last words spoken here on earth – might also be our first words spoken in heaven? If so, then John would have asked the Lord upon his arrival – “What time is it?” And the Lord would have responded – “well it's time for me to wrap my arms around you and welcome you home. Time for me to take away all that pain you have been living with for a while– but never once complaining about.

And it's time for me to ask Peter and Andrew, James and John – to prepare a cooler: I'll have them throw in a few cokes, some twinkies, and yes a beer or two – because we are all going fishing. And it's time for me to tell these fisherman I called to follow after me – to watch out, because the competition has arrived.”

John, we will miss you --- but won't you have a grand time in heaven while you wait for us.