

HE KNOWS OUR PAIN

God grace is sufficient, also for the sadness of a stillbirth.

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Thursday, Jan. 14, 1999, 3:15 p.m. The nurse tries to hear our baby's heartbeat. Nothing. She gets another nurse and a better amplifier. After several more attempts, the second nurse leaves to speak with the doctor.

4:15 p.m. The ultrasound shows our baby, but no heartbeat. What went wrong?

8 p.m. Delivery could take another day. It is not unlike giving birth to a live baby, but with our child being stillborn, potent drugs can be used to expedite the process.

Friday, 10:10 a.m. A baby girl, Sophie Charissa, is delivered. There are no complications, physically anyway. Sophie is very small, nine inches long, and she weighs less than a pound. She is dark-skinned from being dead for so long. Yet she is beautiful. She has her brother's toes, her dad's eyes, her mother's fingers.

Saturday, 10:30 a.m. We develop pictures from the hospital and decide to show them to Caleb, our three-and-one-half-year-old son. "She is so cute," he says. His face shines with big-brother excitement. Now it is real for him.

2 p.m. We are overwhelmed at the turnout. What a show of love and support! While no one knows what to say, everyone says the right thing. Two thoughts from the service are very meaningful. (The service is from the *Lutheran Worship Agenda*, "Burial of the Stillborn.") First,

In love God has blessed his people also with the washing of Holy Baptism, through which he gives rebirth in the power of the Holy Spirit to us and to our children. When in his will God allows the sadness of stillbirth, we trust that he himself is not bound to the means of grace that he has provided for our conscientious use. So we look in faith and hope to him who alone is the source of our faith and hope, trusting that in his grace he has received this child to himself for the sake of his Son Jesus Christ.

By God's grace, our Sophie is in heaven with Jesus.

The other words? "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord" (Job 1:21).

For some reason, Job's words remind me of King David's lament after the death of his child born from his sinful relationship with Bathsheba.

"While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I

fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, and he will not return to me" (2 Sam. 12:22-23).

God gave us the life of Sophie, and although we will never know her here on earth, we will know her in heaven. I have a hard time with the idea that God took her away, but I know that she is with Him, and in that sense, He has taken her to a better place.

So what went wrong? Why did this happen? I believe the best illustration is the account of the healing of the man born blind (John 9:1-7). The disciples wondered whether the man was blind because of his sin or his parents' sin. Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life." Then Jesus healed the man.

After the service, someone thanked Gayle and me for our witness throughout this ordeal. Gayle asked, "How does an unbeliever make it through this type of situation?"

I suspect they do not. By God's grace we have the courage and strength to continue. Most of all, He has given His only Son for us on the cross. He knows our pain. He understands. He is there to help. To Him be the glory.