

Fischer Anderson

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace from God who raises Jesus to new life and promises to bring you new life, too. Amen.

When the people long ago despaired that God had forgotten them, the prophet Isaiah proclaimed, *Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name, you are mine.* As we gather today in sorrow and grief, and maybe just a touch of anger, it is good to hear that promise. God knows you by name, your whole identity, every atom and corpuscle of your being. There is nothing you need to hide from God. For as Paul promised the Corinthians, God loves you with a *love that never ends*. In another place Paul says, *I am convinced that neither death nor life nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.* Nothing – not even death – will be able to separate you or me or Fischer from the love of God because you are God's beloved child whom God calls by name.

Fischer Chase Anderson died last week after a deep struggle with depression. Many of us cannot fathom the dark despondent valleys he experienced. People die from all kinds of physical causes: cancer, heart disease, accidents. What claimed Fischer's life was depression. It is a serious illness. However, we know Fischer was not defined by his depression any more than you or I are defined by high blood pressure or near-sightedness. It is just that it hurts us. It is hard for us who remain when there is a suicide, and it is often confusing because we have lots of questions. Whatever questions you have are okay, but what is more important than any possible answer is this: try to give and receive love. No answer ultimately satisfies, but love embraces us. Depression and anxiety are difficult forces that we as a society often do not deal well with, but love, God's love enfleshed among us, can bring us life again.

It is good to hear the lively remembrances of Fischer. Fischer was active, loyal, persistent, creative. Fischer liked to push at the edges. It would not be enough to tell him to do something; Fischer would want to know why. Joan, you said one of the gifts Fischer gave you was learning that pushing insistence and how it got lived out in courage. Fischer was a kid who lost a lot of mittens; too busy moving. Fischer liked to jump off roofs and decks and railings. He got a lot of scrapes, stitches, and band aids. In his short life there were many cell phone screens that got replaced. Joan and Rohn said they received more than a few phone calls about Fischer and his vertical exploits, often including a building or trampoline. Fischer loved to plan BIG birthday celebrations, neighborhood St. Patrick's Day parties, and delighted in bringing treats to school. Fischer loved his music and a new song such as Adele's song "Hello" could be repeatedly listened to at the kitchen table while doing homework. He played the piano. Drew pictures of animals, doodled the alphabet, snowboarded, waterskied, played lacrosse, and of course soccer. Fischer struggled with gender identity, but then he reached clarity and showed great courage coming out as a transgender male. I heard that you at St. Paul Central were wonderful in that process with Fischer and the family. I saw how amazing Fischer's family – Duncan, Rohn, Joan – how amazing you were in loving Fischer and surrounding him with your extended family's support. That is remarkable love. I wish that for all. Some of you know that struggle perhaps. Remember, you are beloved as you are. Gay, trans, bi, hetero, inter, whatever, none of those labels define you. When we heard in the gospel that God said to Jesus, *You are my beloved child, with you I am well-pleased*, that is not just for Jesus. That message extends to you.

You are God's beloved child in whom God delights. Neither life nor death nor things present nor things to come nor depression nor gender transition nor grief nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from God's love in Christ. Our task is to keep making space for that love to touch every yearning heart.

Fischer could be intense, persistent, and loyal. Fiercely loyal. If he was your friend, I understand Fischer would listen to you, care for you, protect your secrets. Fischer loved all of his aunts and uncles. He was witty, decisive, and strong-willed. We have heard that he was a risk taker and brave. Joan and Rohn, you made a courageous decision to donate Fischer's organs as a very important gift of life, and this has made a huge impact already. As many as 70 lives will be touched by Fischer's kidneys, heart valves, bone marrow, tissue and the family hopes a little of Fischer's courage will go to those people. Already Fischer touches you all. It took a lot of courage for Fischer to go through many things, dealing with depression and gender transition and not feeling normal. You may experience a multitude of feelings piling into the briefest of instants – confusion, compassion, guilt, gratitude, smiles, sadness, love and laughter all swirled together. That's normal. It is important to remember both how much Fischer enjoyed life, and also how depression had a grip on him so we now grieve our loss. As we grieve, you may be asking: should I have done something different? Listen! It is important to hear this again and again: there was not something you could have done. It is not your fault. There are some things beyond us. Paul wrote to the Corinthians *Now we see in a mirror dimly; then we will see face to face*. There is much we do not and cannot know even about our own hearts; we see dimly now but one day we will see clearly. *Now I know in part but then I shall know fully even as we are fully known*. God knows you fully and so *faith, hope and love abide these three. And the greatest of these is love*. Lots of things end. Semesters end. Knowledge ends. Even life ends. But God's love never ends. God has new life in store. The hole you notice inside you now is because of love. Your love. Fischer's love. God's love that shows us there is something more in store. Your tears, your questions, your up-in-the-heights joys and down-in-the-depths emotions of anger or whatever – nothing will be able to separate you from God's love. In the days ahead remember that there are no magic words to fix this. Just talk about Fischer and what you're feeling. Say "I miss Fischer" or "Fischer had such determination" or "I remember Fischer's laugh." Joan and Rohn, in the days ahead you will need a community for support. Receive their care. We know that you gave Fischer such gifts of love. Remember that God calls Fischer and you by name. God knows Fischer through and through, and is present to give eternal life to Fischer and to you. Let us live with conviction that nothing will separate us from God's love. Amen.