



*For death is the destiny of every person;
the living should take this to heart.*
Ecclesiastes 7:2b

Knowing that I enjoy reading historical fiction, my niece recommended I read *The Living* by Annie Dillard. The book tells, in fictional format, the story of the founding of the state of Washington. Among the characters and the plots of the novel are two men - a bully from childhood and his foster brother. The bully, reaching manhood, has moved beyond the thrill of killing simply for the sake of killing. His excitement now lies in choosing, by drawing a name from a hat, a person not to kill. He approaches and tells that person he is going to kill him. Then he proceeds to hound that person and watch the person's life be destroyed by the constant threat of death. One such victim is his foster brother.

The reader follows the drama of this encounter. The foster brother works through various states of mind in living with the threat of his death. At one point, he states that he has always known that he is going to die -- but just not believed it.

I can relate to that. I know I will die. Being a "planner," I have my will written, the niche for my cremated ashes purchased, and have reviewed the spelling of my name on the slab to go in front of it. But, do I really believe I will die? A test came recently as I turned to the obituary page of our local newspaper and found my picture staring out at me. The woman who died looked exactly like me. I didn't know her, the family name is not one I know, but it surely looked like me. Yes, I do believe that I will die. At the time of my death, it is quite possible that my family will choose to put a picture of me in the newspaper as part of an obituary. The picture, at that time, will really be one taken of me.

Even though I believe I will die, I love life. And, I want eternal life with God. I also believe that I must follow God's laws to inherit eternal life. Yet like St. Paul, in my earthly life there are frequently times when *"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do."* Also, like St. Paul, I say, *"What a wretched person I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?"* And, like St. Paul, answer, *"Thanks be to God - through Jesus Christ our Lord!"* Romans 7:15 and 24-25

Jesus, I pray that at the time of my earthly death you will say to me -- as you did to the criminal on the cross -- "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."
Luke 23:43

The two photos, provided by the author, are from the cemetery of the parish church in Radstadt, Austria