

Perfect

We sit next to the hospital bed, looking at the man whose days are down to a handful. He was born with cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities, and his hasn't been an easy life. For 59 years, he's had the greatest difficulty walking. For 59 years, he's had the cognitive functions of a small child.

Most notably, for 59 years, he's been a baptized child of God.

He lies on his back in the bed, and one eye opens to size up the stranger in the clerical collar as I take his hand to pray and read some Scripture, then put my hand on his head to speak the Benediction. Beyond that, he's tired and unresponsive.

HOW CAN A
PERSON BORN
WITH CRIPPLING
DISABILITIES
EVER BE CALLED
PERFECT?



by *Tim Pauls*

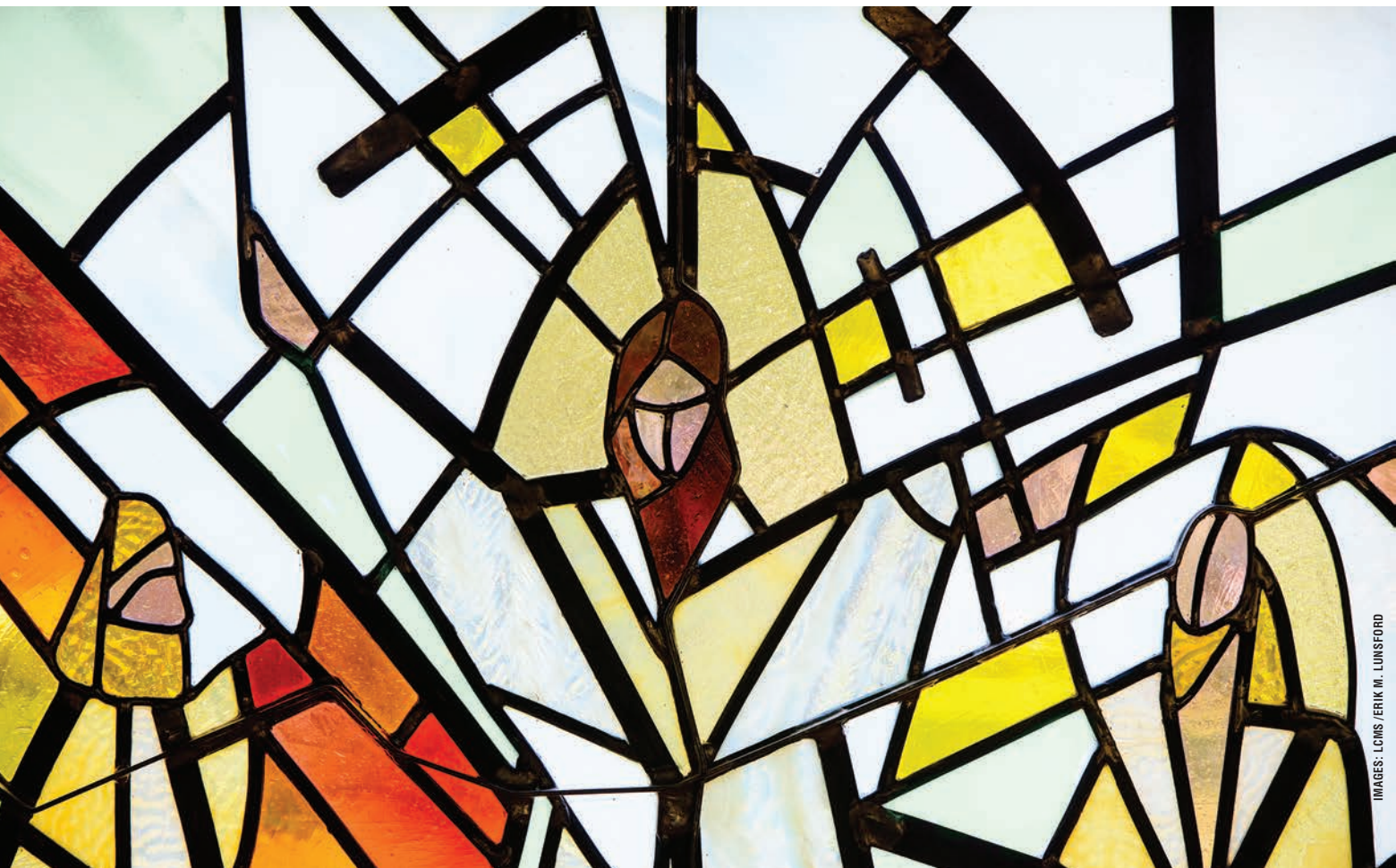
His mother tells me some stories and concludes, "He's had a good life."

I reflect, then softly reply, "And just wait until his resurrection."

She pauses, returns my smile and says, "You're right. He'll be so much better than he is right now. And right now, he's perfect."

Right now, he's perfect.

She speaks as a mother who has watched her son live with severe disabilities — and as she herself has said, he'll be so much better on the Last Day. But she isn't speaking with a maternal love that sees no wrong. She knows how much his



physical imperfections have scarred his life, and how much he has suffered because of them. And she knows that he's a sinner in need of grace.

Yet she talks, too, about how her son has always enjoyed childlike innocence without accruing the suspicion, cynicism, scars and hurt that so many of us accumulate over decades. She tells me how her son would talk to people about Jesus with the unfiltered boldness of a small child, and how it never occurred to him that he should hesitate, calculate and play the game of waiting for the right moment that many of us so often do.

That's what she means when she says he's perfect: she's saying that the Lord, in His wisdom and mercy, has made perfect use of her son.

But he's not ... perfect, right? He will be so much better at the resurrection. "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy" (1s. 35:5-6). And then he will know true perfection.

The truth, of course, is that none of us is perfect. The "wages of sin" manifests itself in so many different ways, some more debilitating than others. Creeping middle-age notwithstanding, I have a medical profile that qualifies me as "healthy," but I'm still nowhere near what God intended humanity to be before the fall — or what He promises to make us in the fullness of time. Neither are you. Sin has corrupted us so much that we have no idea of what perfection even looks like. We only know that we are incomplete, that our bodies fail us and that, apart from Christ, only death awaits.

But joined to Christ? That's a different story. We live in hope, knowing that the perfect Son of God bore our sins, as well as our infirmities and diseases, in His body on the cross. We're in the "now," waiting for the "not yet"; but we

live in the confidence that for the sake of Jesus, God the Father sees us as holy, and as wholly restored. What the Lord sees, we wait to behold on the Last Day. The resurrection of the body is going to be glorious for all the people of God, old or young, frail or strong, able-bodied or not-so-able-bodied.

It's at times like this hospital visit that I marvel at the Christmas story as told in the Nicene Creed: "who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man."

For us men and for our salvation. True God becomes true man to heal our infirmities, bear our sins, die our death and raise us up to eternal life.

Yet even this joy can be controversial to proclaim. Some argue that it is wrong to say that a person with disabilities is less than perfect, because it makes disabilities sound inherently negative and thus fosters discrimination by "ableists." Yet we know that the words of the Creed are not about power and discrimination, but about good news: *none* of us is what we should be, Christ makes us whole, and in the meantime, let us bear each other's burdens and love one another.

My 59-year-old brother in Christ has long since departed for the eternal day. He left this world with a childlike faith (the best kind!) that Jesus is His Savior. As we sing in the hymn, we feebly struggle, but he in glory shines.

His resurrection is going to be perfect. Absolutely perfect. In Christ, so will yours. **LW**

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