

All Saints' Day

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By Ruth Harvey, Sarah Hills, Brec Seaton, Pádraig Ó Tuama, Pat Bennett, Alex Wimberly, Janet Foggie

Introduction

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by Ruth Harvey, leader of the Iona Community

As we enter the season of All Souls and All Saints, still in the context of a deadly virus, we remember and give thanks for those we have loved and lost.

In June this year the Spirituality of Conflict team, and the world, lost a dearly beloved companion, Glenn Jordan who died suddenly. He was a pillar of strength and creativity in this team and we miss his wit and wisdom sorely. We grieve, with his family, daily. And so we share with you here a collection of reflections on grief and grieving in memory of Glenn and of all the saints who go before us.

Text

Matthew 5: 1 – 12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying:

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Comment

A touch of love or a touch that kills?

By Sarah Hills, Vicar of Holy Island, June 2020

I have been feeling angry, sad, bewildered. George Floyd in Minneapolis died being held down, kneeled on, struggling for breath. Touch comes in different forms. George died from a touch that killed him. That touch was sustained, unwarranted, brutal and deadly. That touch of a policeman's body was seen by those around them in the street that day. It was seen by millions on TV. And that touch has come to symbolise much that is wrong in our world. Hate, racism, division, arrogance, even evil.

And then Donald Trump touches the bible in front of an Episcopal church. Another touch – calculated, shocking, sinister. The bible is a book about love. The gospel message found within it is one of inclusion, not division. Of love triumphing over death. Of righteous anger, forgiveness and justice. Of diversity and welcome and healing. Of reconciliation. But these are not only words. These cannot only be words. The bible embodies these words in the touch of Jesus Christ. His touch of love for us. And he let us touch him – his cloak, his side, his hands and feet.

In Church in Holy Week, we recreate Jesus's act of touching his disciples as he washed their feet, days before his own death. I find this act of foot washing on Maundy Thursday one of the most moving and poignant services. Touching another's foot, drying their toes carefully, feels like one of the most sacramental of acts. An act of service, of devotion, of intimate connection. The feet come in all shapes and sizes, some toes painted, some misshapen and painful looking. Feet with a story to tell. Where have these feet walked? With whom? Why? Have they had to run from danger? Or made prints in the sand on the beach? Touches of love.

My father died at the end of March. I had not been able to say goodbye to him, and so I really wanted to see him at the chapel of rest. I did. But what I most wanted to do was to touch him. And I did. I held his hand, kissed him, and said goodbye. Of course, that last touch was not the same...but it was a touch of love.

I wonder if George Floyd's family were able to give him a last touch of love, after the touch that killed him?

Our need for comfort through touch, through hugging a friend, through sitting on a parent's lap, through holding a dying hand, is about goodness. It is grace filled, and in theological language, sacramental. It is about love being made visible.

It is an abhorrent distortion of this touch of love to kill someone because of their race. Or their colour, or creed, or sexuality or gender. Or for any reason.

I am a white South African, full of privilege. I am a mother and wife, delighting in our two boys and our Labrador. I am also Vicar of Holy Island, and Canon of Reconciliation for the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church. As a reconciler, it seems no accident that I find myself on Holy Island, a liminal place straddling the land and the sea, a beautiful place where pilgrims come to have their hearts and souls touched. A place founded by St Aidan in 635AD, an Irish monk sent from Scotland as a peacemaker.

My life is full of privilege. I know that. Maybe I shouldn't even be writing this piece. But I believe that as a South African who grew up in Northern Ireland during the troubles, now priest and reconciler living on a holy island, that I have some duty to say something. And so I offer this in humility. Not because I am an expert. Not because I have experienced the racism that George Floyd and millions of others

have. But because I am confused and heartbroken. I feel the need to offer something of myself through writing this in order to work through what is going on around us, and in case it resonates with anyone else.

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has said that to be silent in the face of oppression is to choose the side of the oppressor. This oppression has benefitted me and all of us who look like me.

This last week I have been forcibly reminded of the time of apartheid in South Africa that my parents and countless others fought against. Of numerous deaths because of race and colour. Deaths due to the touch of blows, of batons, of bullets, of electric shocks. I was born in South Africa, and my parents were both involved in anti-apartheid activities. We left when I was a young child and went to Northern Ireland where I grew up. As a medical student I spent time back in South Africa working in a rural hospital in the 1980's. While there, I found myself joining in protest marches with thousands of other South Africans, demonstrating against apartheid. During one of the marches, the police fired on us. I joined other medics in the back streets of the township treating those who had been shot. I touched someone's shoulder as I fought to remove the bullet lodged in his muscle.

Afterwards, the bullet out, we exchanged the touch of a bloody and careful hug. He and I were fortunate that day. George Floyd, Trayvon Martin, Stephen Lawrence, Ahmaud Arbery, Belly Mujinga, Steve Biko, the people on the bridge in Selma, and thousands of others were not.

My dear friend Glenn Jordan died in June. He was a true reconciler, a brave and beautiful man. Funny, hopeful, deeply humble and one of the most profound and poetic thinkers I have known. I remember him sitting on our sofa here on Holy Island, glass of whiskey in his hand, touching my heart, and all of ours there that evening. I suggested a swim off St Cuthbert's beach below our garden the next morning. The touch of the icy water, then the touch of our frozen hands as we high fived afterwards. The touch of love. I never got the chance to hear what Glenn would have to say about the situation we find ourselves in this week. In the USA, and if we are honest, everywhere in our broken world, we have lived, we continue to live with conflict, violence, and the touch of death. But I know that Glenn would not want me to stop there. Nor would my father.

The touch of love is here to stay. The touch of love enables us to be angry. And so we should be. To grieve. To lament. To search for justice. For all those suffering racism, brutality and discrimination throughout our world. For our children and our children's children. And these things – grief, lament, searching for justice and even forgiveness, we must do. Without them, reconciliation is useless. But if we can hold fast to the touch of love, reconciliation will come. Maybe not today. Or tomorrow. But it is there in the hope that Jesus Christ brings us. The touch of love is stronger than the touch that kills. Always. And forever. I share here a prayer from the 'father of reconciliation', Desmond Tutu

Victory is Ours

Goodness is stronger than evil; Love is stronger than hate; Light is stronger than darkness; Life is stronger than death; Victory is ours through Him who loves us. Amen.

Bread and Butter pudding: a tribute to Ronald Alfred Radley. by Brec Seaton

Bread and Butter Pudding – the last food Dad tasted before leaving his home. No one quite mastered this English classic like my Gran. The full horror of PPE and Covid-19 in sharp contrast to this delicious meal we shared as children around the

table at my Gran's.

And so now I wait.

I woke at 4am and felt Dad's spirit passing over.

And yet I wait.

Wait for the hospital to phone.

Wait as no visitors are allowed.

Wait in lockdown – no longer my place of hibernation.

A place to wait.

A place to watch in the darkness

A place to watch the light of day take its place.

And still I wait.

It has been a night for prayer... and tea. The light has come now, shading the darkness for a while. The candle has done its work for now.

And so I wait. In hoping, in longing, in turmoil and yet at peace.

I wait for the news that will bring me to a place of lament, of sorrow, of waiting for the resurrection that will surely come.

Of news that Dad is now at peace – reunited with my Gran and with our Lord.

A Reflection on Grief and Bereavement with Young Adults by Janet Foggie

Grief and bereavement is also about life. We are looking at an experience that we all have, and one which we will also create at some point when we die. This means it is a topic that quickly brings powerful stories to the surface. We may find ourselves looking at questions with new eyes, thinking about stories, books or movies in new ways. There is always a danger that the powerful stories will overwhelm us, or that we will be swayed by the desire to tell stories in a way that isn't helpful to others, and not to bring our hearts and minds to the task in hand of walking with the bereaved, and carrying our own grief in a way we, and they, can manage.

Prayer:

Breath of life, we feel our breath within us

Breath which breathes your breath

Life eternal

Breath which breathes love

Love eternal

Breath which give us voice

Word eternal

Gather us in our shared voices, shared time and shared desire to work for the good. Gather us with our private memories, unique stories, which form us, and, make us who we are.

Gather us as members of your people, striving to find a voice for grief and give that grieving voice living breath in your world.

Yet, living love, we come also humble, aware that sometimes we speak out of turn, we interrupt or are agitated. We find hard stories, big stories, difficult both to speak and to hear, forgive us for those moments we do not hear the whole story, and enable us to share with love and care what we need to say into situations of loss, and in our own loss.

Merciful and gracious god who raised Lazarus from the dead, thank you for your forgiveness that grants to each of us the confidence of eternal life, and come into this specific moment of time with each of us alive today, as we remember those we have loved and lost, who are gathered into your eternal arms forever.

Sequoias and Tattoos **by Alex Wimberley**

One of the things our friend Glenn left with us is the image of the sequoia seed.

It was a symbol he wanted to carry with him always, and so he had it tattooed on his leg. It's a pine cone, but not from an ordinary Christmas tree. These little seeds, packed into palm-sized cones, become in time the giants of the redwood forests in California, with trunks as wide as lorries. Glenn not only found inspiration in the sheer grandeur of these trees, whose roots run back for thousands of years, but in their witness to hope.

Sequoia seeds open with the heat of forest fires. In the clearing that fires create, sequoias take root – taking advantage of the exposed sunlight and the enriched, ashen soil. They are a living reminder that some things endure beyond our devastating moments. One imagines that in the aftermath of the horrific and sobering forest fires of this past summer (the wake-up call nature is giving us), there are cones of ancient trees popping open, witnesses to nature's resilience and to our short-sighted environmental priorities. And witnesses to the idea that even in the midst of disaster, there can come the start of new and magnificent life.

As we reflect this All Saints' Day on what endures even through disaster and crisis and beyond the reality of death, we look for new shoots of life. This year has been a disaster for so many – hitting, as is often the case – the most vulnerable the hardest. It has revealed longstanding discrepancies of injustice we can no longer ignore. The pandemic has exposed inequalities that cannot continue. And yet there are – even in and because of the fractures that have been exposed – places where the enduring strength of empathy and compassion can take root in heated soil, and create the possibility of a better and more just world.

In taking inspiration of those who have lived faithfully, we trust that we can discover new ways of being from our better relationships with one another. On issues of race, class, climate justice, borders and nation, and so many other difficult conversations, it will be in honest, human connection that we will find a better world and hold on to what is divine.

For what is of God will endure. And God is with us in community.

'Everything dies together' **by Pat Bennett**

As for all too many of us, my year has been punctuated by loss: four untimely deaths – two involving dear friends, colleagues, and significant mentors – along with a covid-related redundancy have left painful holes and rents in the flesh and fabric of my life. But more than this, they have led to a deep sense of disruption to, and dislocation from, some significant webs of connection into which my life has been woven in the last decade: there is a dual aspect to loss which we perhaps do not always sufficiently appreciate. In time the wounds of grief will, we hope, heal to a scar and an ache but we also have to attend to the second aspect of loss.

In his poem 'What I Must Tell Myself', David Whyte observes that a death is not confined only to that which dies – everything standing in relationship with it also dies and 'must live again in a different way'. Likewise when something is missing, *everything* 'must be found again in a new whole.' It is not simply a case of eventually recovering and reassembling the old patterns of connection disrupted by loss – be that of a person, a home, a job, or a role, we need to completely reimagine and remake them. For me an important aspect of this with some of these recent losses has been to try and weave new webs of living which draw on and honour the gifts received from those who are no longer here. This in turn has become part of the long slow process through which the associated wounds begin to heal.

On All Saints' Day, it's good to remember those who have been saints to us, to retell and reflect on the stories of those connections, and then through them to let our vision of the Kingdom of God be expanded and deepened. Though we can no longer see or hear, touch or smell these loved ones whom we mourn, they live on – not just in the greater life of the Divine, but in the changes they have made to us and to the world.

Prayer

A Prayer for Firsts by Pádraig Ó Tuama

The first year is a year of anniversaries:
The first year you're gone; the first
Christmas; the first anniversary without you;
the first birthday without a card from you; without
a card for you.

Even though you're gone,
I think about you every day.

And every day I hold the love I had for you.
It isn't enough, but it's enough today, another
day without you, another day when I get to
continue the gift of having loved you, having
grown because I knew you, having
laughed and cried with and for you.

And this, today, is the gift for you. That you
are not forgotten, never will be. I carry
you in my heart.

A Prayer for times of Grief by Pádraig Ó Tuama

God of all time,

We ask, we weep, we wait, we die, we hope, we live, we carry on, we pick ourselves

up, we try to understand, we misunderstand, we learn, we ask again, we wait for understanding.

In all of these, may prayer be a companion, not a torment.

May we find in prayer the consolation
that sustains us through all things,
Knowing that some things change,
and some things remain the same.

Amen.

A hymn for All Saints and All Souls **Text © Pat Bennett**

Tune: Eventide (Abide with me)

We gather at this margin of our world
where we are held by time – from which you're gone,
to light that threshold with our love and thanks,
to tell your story and to sing you on.

Your vision and commitment stirred our lives,
challenging us to move beyond confines;
in every ripple spreading from that change
your energy still runs, your light still shines.

We celebrate your wisdom, wit and care
and treasure every gift which memory brings;
through words and acts recalled and honoured now
your warmth still nurtures us, your voice still sings.

And though we can no longer see your face,
though touch and sound and scent of you are gone,
we know that in God's heart, as in our own,
held in the web of love you will live on.

It is very easy to personalise this text by adapting the nouns in the second and third verses to reflect the person being remembered. If the idea of 'singing' someone on feels a little awkward then an alternative for verse 1 would be:

We gather at this margin of our world
where you must take a path we don't yet know,
to light that threshold with our love and thanks
to tell your story and to let you go.

Season: Ordinary time

Themes: Relationships