

June 27th, 2021

Year B; 5th Pentecost

Wisdom of Solomon 1:13-15; 2:23-24

Psalms 30

Mark 5: 21-43

“In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

I am often startled to find that the readings assigned for each week can be either mundane and familiar, or jump of the page and seem to have been written specifically for me.

This week is one of those jumping off the page and written for me times. As many of you know, Time and I experienced two deaths a few weeks ago, our beloved dog Bix, and my dear friend Virginia Hallock. Both of these dear ones died of sudden and fast-growing cancers, Bix living just a month, Virginia, two and a half months.

As I clean up my desk from the chaos of the past weeks, I keep finding notes that Virginia wrote to me over the past 6 months. Virginia was very good at using the computer to forward things to her family and friends. But she saved her truest voice for that now rare and treasured item, the handwritten note.

And so, with her notes, I can hear her voice, healthy and energetic, speculating on when the pandemic will end, when can we see each other again face to face...notes from Christmas, Easter...reminding me to rest and take care, talking about when we can all get back to Maine, maybe even meet up and spend time together in our favorite place. Planning ahead....talking of the future...

And then I looked to this week's readings several days ago and found all this talk of death.

Our reading from the Wisdom of Solomon exhorts that “God did not make death, and he does not delight in the death of the living.”

But God did create us mortal, and thus our time is limited here on earth, limited to our lifespan, but I do believe that God takes no delight in the death of the living, and I believe that God grieves the death of each of God's creatures, a corgi mix dog or an 83-year-old woman.

Our Psalm speaks too of death, close at hand, and then the return of strength:

“O Lord my God, I cried out to you, and you restored my life as I was going down to the grave...”

And again, death near at hand, and much suffering too, in our gospel from Mark. A young girl 12 years old, close to death; and a woman suffering for 12 years, hemorrhaging, an exhausting and unending disease, that has also rendered her an outcast, the blood always defining her as unclean.

I was not in the mood to preach about death, and hope recovered, healing and new life...

Our psalm too speaks of “Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning.”

But I say, no thank you.

I’m grieving, I’m worn out, and I’m sad.

I don’t want to hear of miracles and healings.

I want Virginia and Bix to be ok, to be here, to be whole and healed.

So, I put the Bible aside and I listened to Bruce Springsteen. I had 8 hours in the car by myself a week ago Friday, driving to Charlottesville to take part in Virginia’s funeral, and driving home the same day. Tim stayed home with Autumn who was doing her own grieving, looks for Bix, insisting on lying on his bed, a very large dog on a very small bed.

Eight hours alone in the car and you hear a lot of music. Bruce Springsteen’s song “Atlantic City” made its way into my brain. Anybody know it?

One review called it “...perhaps one of Springsteen’s most dour songs.”

I was feeling pretty dour, pretty gloomy, so it suited me fine.

Except...expect in this gloomy song, we are invited to remember that, in fact, though “weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning.”

The reviewer noted: “The song wrestles with the inevitability of death, and the hope of rebirth in various ways....”

The chorus says:

Everything dies baby that's a fact

But maybe everything that dies someday comes back

Put your makeup on fix your hair up pretty and

Meet me tonight in Atlantic City

Goodness grief fills us up, and at times overwhelms us.

But again and again we are jolted into remembering that life is still a gift, and not to be wasted. We do need to get out there, perhaps not to Atlantic City, but back out into life.

And though we might have been suffering for an hour or for 12 years, Jesus, our brother our savior, is still close at hand, and even grazing the hem of his garment with our finger tips, reaching just that far towards our savior, will bring us, not immortality....remember..."Everything dies baby that's a fact...."

No, we will not live forever if we touch his garment, a thread of his love, but while we live, while we are here, we are called to reach out and hope, and to help others reach out too.

Then, then we can know that our souls and spirits can be healed and whole, and filled with God's peace, even within our grief.

Virginia's husband, Harold, gave me a book written by a friend of his, as a thank you for taking part in her funeral. Harold is the priest who baptized me at 24 years old. The book, by Herbert O'Driscoll, an Irish priest and writer, who is now 93 years old, is a memoir, a reflection on the meaning of places and people in his life.

I started reading the book this week, and as I read yesterday, brooding in my gloomy state, pushing away any joy that might come in the early morning, Driscoll wrote of gratitude.

He quoted the German preacher and mystic, Meister Eckhart, who lived in the late 1200s and early 1300s. There was much upheaval and conflict in the church then, of course, we don't know anything about that in today's church.

And yet though living in what Driscoll refers to as “...that dark and terrible early 14th century...”

Still Meister Eckhart wrote in that dark and painful era:

“If you were to say only one prayer in your whole life, and that prayer were ‘thank you’ that would suffice.”

“Everything dies baby that’s a fact....”

So I say thank you for Virginia and for Virginia’s life, and the privilege and joy of being her friend and godchild.

And I say thank you for Bix, our always optimistic, always funny dog, who carried us through our transition from Richmond to the Northern Neck.

Weeping may spend the night, but joy comes in the morning....

Thank you, thank you, thanks be to God.

Amen.