

November 6th, 2022

Year C; Proper 27; All Saints Day observed

Job 19: 23-27a

Psalm 17: 1-9

Luke 20: 27-38

Job 19:23-27a

Job said,

"O that my words were written down!

O that they were inscribed in a book!

*O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock forever!*

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth;
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side,
and my eyes shall behold, and not another."*

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

When I tested positive for Covid I was surprised by my reaction to what was fairly predictable news. I had sat at dinner at Shrine Mont next to a friend who did not feel well but had tested negative twice for Covid. We talked and caught up as we ate, our faces close together. And the next day she tested positive. A doctor friend referred to the "massive viral load" I received from this close contact. So testing positive did not shock me, but the emotion I felt in that news did surprise me.

I was keenly aware of my good fortune to be catching Covid now, with a booster in me and medicines available to shorten the illness, thus making the experience a blip in my life, rather than a full stop.

But I found myself emotional, with unbidden thoughts of the past almost three years of the Covid pandemic, of the early days and folks suddenly so terribly ill, and dying so quickly, and dying alone in isolation, their hand held only by a masked and gowned weary healthcare worker.

And I thought of the over one million Americans who have died of Covid so far, and the 6 and half million people worldwide who have died. And I found myself weepy for all this loss, and for all of those grieving these millions.

So I find myself especially grateful for All Saints Day this year. This day provides a time and a place to bring our grief. After funerals are done, there are few places in our world to bring our grief, and yet each year the church remembers and invites us to come together, not to sit alone with our grief.

Our prayers, our readings, the list we will pray together soon all invite us not to look aside, not to think of something else, but to allow ourselves to remember and to feel our losses.

A dear old friend, one of my first friends when I joined the church, told me, as I was embarrassed to cry tears of grief in a Sunday service: “If you can’t cry at church, where can you cry?”

Our opening collect reminds us that we are indeed literally knit together with those we love who have died. We are no longer face to face, but we still are knit together, connected. I can’t explain it, but I am certain it is true that those we love who have died are knit, stitched, intricately connected to us for eternity, and reside not apart, but with us in “the mystical body of Jesus Christ our Lord”.

Our reading from Job might have echoed with familiarity for you, as a portion of this reading is part of the opening anthem that begins many Episcopal funerals, the “I am Resurrection and I am Life”.

This Job reading comes from a place of grief and loneliness for Job. As you may know, Job is a story of a good and righteous man who lost everything and everyone he loved. He is desolate, alone, in ill health. And his friends

come to see him, sadly not to offer consolation or care, but to tell Job his losses are his own fault, that to suffer so much he must have done something terrible, sinned.

And Job, even in his suffering, will not accept this cruel logic from his friends. And Job speaks up, calling for his words be remembered not just in a book but engraved in rock, as he says, that, no, his losses and grief are not his fault, and that in the midst of this pain, he knows one thing, he is not alone, he does not walk this bitter road alone.

*As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth.
After my awaking, he will raise me up;
and in my body I shall see God.
I myself shall see, and my eyes behold him
who is my friend and not a stranger.*

We need in our grief to know that God is with us, we are not alone. And we need others to be with us, being God's hands and feet on earth, letting us know we are not alone with our grief.

Many years ago, I was doing grief counseling with a boy whose father had died of a brain tumor, when the boy was six years old. I'll call him John. I saw John regularly for the first year after his father's death, and then periodically in the years after. When John was 11 years old, we were talking about how he was coping, growing up, and living deeply, ready to move onto to the Middle School, enjoying sports and school. And in the midst of our visit, he told me, almost matter of factly:

"I still cry at night often for my Dad. I miss him so much."

And I was reminded again how we grieve. And how we need to be able to say: I miss him so much, I miss her so much. And not have folks rush away from us.

The church does not get everything right, by far, but I am grateful that the church gets this right. We have All Saints Day, this day to remember, to name, to weep, to pray, and to say if we need to: I miss them so much.

Amen.

And now we will read our list of those names folks asked to have included on our All Saints list this year. Traditionally, All Saints is for remembering and naming those who have died in the past 12 months.

But we all know that grief does not take just a year. And so, after I have read the list, we will have a time of quiet for other names to be offered out loud, in a whisper, or in your heart, of those who died this year or 5 years ago, or 50 years ago. All are welcome to be named among those we are knit together with, always.