

Other Parts of Worship – All Saints’ Day

Introduction

Excerpt from Summer Gone, David MacFarlane

Lark had told them that the Indians believed the souls of the dead
traveled in poised, beautiful canoes.
He said they passed through the eddies and swirls of the Milky Way.
Bay liked that.

From the time he had gone to camp, he had always imagined souls flying.
At low altitudes at first.
They escaped the city.
They dove from windowsills like Superman.

Then: winging over rooftops and streets, they headed by angelic instinct for the north.
God’s country.

In the instant before anyone sitting in a hospital room
sees the transformation that has taken place,
they swoop beyond farms and highway hamburger stands and souvenir trading posts.

They head toward the woods and the blue lacework of lakes.
They bank from the path of the highways.
They follow the narrow, gravel roads like low-flying bombers evading radar.
They break out from the shore and skim over the water.
They leave gusts across the surface as if trailing baby blankets,
graduation robes, wedding dresses, hospital sheets.
They weave over the islands and inlets.
They fly over long, smooth points of granite and pines.

And on the ground, beneath a narrow opening in the tall trees,
those among the living who are attentive enough
might hear a slow ruffling of overhead wings.

They are going – out past the reefs to open water.
Uncertain of their resolution, they are just going.
Over the brown shoals and over the depths of the blue waves,
rising higher, climbing toward the piled dusk of clouds.

Song

I'll Fly Away

Reading

Why do we remember the dead?

We remember the dead simply because we loved them, and we long to see them again.

We remember the dead because we can't help it.

Things remind us of them.

A particular color brings to mind a favorite shirt or dress.

Fall air laden with diesel fumes and grain dust
brings back harvests spent bumping along in the truck.

The buzz of an electric razor, hair pulled back into a bun,

the rattle of pills in a bottle, a favorite piece of music,

that milky, powdery baby smell,

a pint jar of jam, the heft and smooth wood handle of a hammer,

a flat of tomato seedlings, a red backpack, a La-Z Boy recliner,

a copy of Rejoice! stuffed inside a worn Bible,

Old Spice cologne, the jingle of change in a pocket.

Ordinary things remind us of those who have become extraordinary in their absence.

We remember the dead because we can't help it.

We remember the dead because we know that we will also die.

We confront the mystery of the end of life

and wonder what it was like for those we loved and what it will be like for us.

What will it be like in the moment that our spirit leaves the hospital room,

or the wreckage of an accident scene,

or the clamor of the family gathered around the table,

or the warmth of bed in the middle of night?

What will it be like to be in heaven, to be with God?

To be free of pain and sorrow?

Will we see our parents, our spouse, our friends who have gone before us?

Will we be able to look down and keep an eye on those who are dear to us?

Watch them gather around our own casket,

listen to them tell stories about us over raisin buns and squeaky cheese,

watch them grow old,

take out our photos from time to time,

light a candle to remember us?

Will such earthly things still interest us?
Do such things still interest our own dearly departed?
We remember the dead, and we wonder what it is like to die.

We remember the dead to honor their lives and to learn how to live.
To demonstrate that though they no longer walk with us, sit with us or talk with us,
the impact of their lives on ours is not forgotten, nor is it finished.
We hear the axioms and aphorisms,
needled into our brains by our parents and grandparents,
come out of our own mouths.
We nurse the pain of hurts that were left unresolved
and conversations that were left unfinished.
We find strength from the grace and courage so often displayed during a long illness.
We marvel at the steadfastness of faith.
We wonder what they would have done or what advice they would have given.
We try to face up to what we wish we or they had been like.
We remember their dying and their living,
and when we remember we learn something of how to live.

Today, we will remember the dead by lighting candles and placing them on the altar.
I will pass the baskets of candles around.
There are lots of candles, please take as many as you wish.

We remember the dead, their lives, the goodbyes we shared or wish we had shared.
We remember, for all of the reasons that are important to us, and we say goodbye again.

Candle Lighting

During this time a song may be played. Suggestion: Parting Glass, Stephen Fearing

Reflections

We remember the dead, but we know that death is not the end.

In the film *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* there is a striking scene
where a small procession of people on a riverbank becomes a great crowd of people,
clothed in white, coming down to the river, singing.
Whether these were earthly beings preparing to encounter God,
or angels come down to earth was not immediately clear to me.
What did immediately come to mind were the words from Hebrews 12
about the great cloud of witnesses.

I watched those white-robed figures and listened to those beautiful voices
and I remembered the witnesses, living and dead, who surround me.
Who show me that the way I live my life matters.
Who help me to believe that God not only exists but cares what goes on in this world.
Who assure me that God will bring an end to pain and suffering,
and that it is worth the effort for me to lend God a hand.

We know that God has taken away death's power and sting,
and that our daily task is to live as though that is the case and thus to make it be so.

In the same moment that we remember death, we remember God's great force for life.
Because God works for life, we know that healing and hope are possible.
We pray for our own losses to be healed, and for us to bring healing and hope to others.
We give thanks for our own little cloud of witnesses
and for the riveting example of Jesus who came to show us that this really is God's way.

Scripture Reading

Hebrews 12:1-3

Song

Down to the River To Pray

Dismissal

You're free to go now if you would like.

There will be some more music if you would like to stay and reflect or pray a little longer.

Recorded song suggestion: People Get Ready, Eva Cassidy

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