

In the Name of the Loving, Life-giving, and Liberating God who is blessed Trinity.

When I was growing up, we took a family vacation every summer to Iowa. I grew up in Georgia, so it was no short trip: a 14-hour drive. But we did it every summer to see my dad's side of the family. I loved taking these trips as a kid because we would spend time with my grandparents and my great-grandparents, Grammy G and Papa Peck.

Grammy G always showered us with love. She taught us how to make pies, bringing us into the kitchen to help with pitting cherries or rolling out the crust. She let us search for interesting rocks in her flower beds and saved every rock we shared with her. She sent us out into the yard and watched us through the window as we played. One time, when we pressed our hands on the glass, Mom asked if she could wash the window for her, and she said no. She wanted to remember that moment for as long as those handprints would stay on the window.

She died while I was in seminary at the age of 99. I was blessed to have her for so long, and her life was not unlike those handprints pressed on the window of my soul. Something of her is now and always will be a part of me, and I smile every time I think of her, just like I know she smiled every time she looked at our handprints on the window.

As we gather on All Saints, we remember the big names of the faith, those whom we venerate as saints, whose lives we remember and often try to emulate, like St. Augustine, Absalom Jones, St. Ignatius, and Martin Luther King, Jr. But we also remember those who are near and dear to us, who may not have done anything that is remembered on the world stage, but without whom we would not be the people we are now. We honor those who have left their handprints all over our hearts.

Jesus knew what it was to lose someone dear to him. I love our gospel reading today because it is so real. Jesus resurrects Lazarus, but he also spends time in grief. The NRSV translation changes that famous shortest verse in the Bible, "Jesus wept," to "Jesus began to weep," but both obscure the Greek, which uses a word that would be better translated as "cried." The word emphasizes the tears on Jesus' face. This is not formal mourning, but real emotion. Jesus has lost a dear friend, and even though in John Jesus is always in control and knows that he will soon resurrect his friend, Jesus still cries for what has been lost in that moment.

This story speaks to me about how close God is to our pain and how well God understands it. We know that we will be reunited with our loved ones, but Jesus

shows us that even if that gap, that time when we are missing them, is only a few minutes or a few days long, it is right to grieve them. For many of us, that gap has been and will continue to be much longer, and God is not aloof and uncaring about our pain. It is right to grieve those we have lost.

And in the midst of our grief, God still extends hope. Jesus resurrects Lazarus, as we will all be resurrected on the last day, and in Revelation, God speaks to us about that coming day. It is a day not when we will all go up to heaven, but when heaven will come down to earth. The Kingdom of God, which is both here and not here, will one day be fully here. The new city will come down to earth... and hear the comfort of these words: "The home of God is among mortals," among us. "God will dwell with us, and we will be God's people." The home of God is right here. God is not taking us away to some better place in the sky. God is remaking creation right here and comes to dwell with us.

I am a science fiction and fantasy nerd, so I often think about the Kingdom of God as being right here in this place, but slightly offset in time, just enough so that we only catch glimpses of the world as God intends it to be. We see those glimpses anytime you feel love. The time I spent with my Grammy G was a time when the Kingdom of God overlapped this world in a marvelous way. I'm sure you can think of times in your life, too, when love was so overwhelming you knew God was present in and through you and the people around you. God's love was there. And I still feel that same love when I think about her. It is as if she continues to reach for me from that perfect Kingdom of God, working with God to draw all of creation into that newness and perfection that God has planned for us.

I also feel it every time we come to eat at this Table. The Table that God prepares for us week after week is the Table that is set eternally in the Kingdom of God. This is the feast to which all of the saints are drawn, and we get to join each time we celebrate for a foretaste of what is to come. It is one of those thin places, a place where it is easier to touch the divine, to touch the Kingdom of God that overlays our world.

That is why I invited you all to bring pictures of your loved ones. All those you see here under the altar and all that community that is not pictured, all of them join us in this Eucharistic feast every time we celebrate it. When we come to this Table, we are stepping outside the bounds of our own time to that place where all those we love are feasting with God even now. And it is not only those whom we have loved but all those giants of the faith, all those no longer remembered but who lived lives of love,

all those that God draws nearer day after day. God is drawing all of creation to that banquet table where we will one day all be at home with God. And we come here week after week to tap into that yearning, to be drawn to love, so that we can then be a source of love in the world. When we allow ourselves to be loved—to feel that love from our friends and family, that love which ultimately comes from God—we then become love ourselves, and the Kingdom of God is seen again here on earth.