

Pentecost Year C 2016

Keith.... David... Adele... Alan... Danielle, and Melanie have all died. Six members of the All Saints family in the last eight weeks... What do we make of that? What does it mean, if anything? It seems to me that sometimes this journey we are upon that we call life, demands a reckoning.... So, let's reckon for a while. Here's what I don't think... I don't think this is a part of God's plan.... Whether death comes as the release from suffering at an old age.... Or whether it comes abruptly, unexpectedly... It is still death... There's no preparing for it, really... It comes inevitably amid the random, improvisational unfolding of the created order... I really don't think God plans for death... death just is... The human community has been ritually burying their dead since before recorded history... It is, as far as we know, the oldest rite of our religious heritage... Death is, and has been, the premier subject for writers and artists, and theologians, and philosophers... we don't understand any more about why death is now, than we have over the millennia... But, we know still that it is at the heart of who we are as humans, part of the created order, the way of things, which, according to our mythology, in the beginning God called good.

Augustine in the fourth century of the Common Era associated death with human sin, human free will... that death was somehow of our own making... Western civilization has borne that notion of death for many centuries... in fact in our rite of unction, the anointing of the sick and dying, confession of sin is at the heart of the matter... that somehow sin and death symbiotic, as it were, in partnership... I don't believe that... I think that death just is... and it comes amid the infinite possibilities of existence.

Wallace Stevens, in his great epic poem, Sunday Morning, proclaims prophetically that "Death is the mother of beauty." The poem takes a cold look at the transience of life, that it flees in an instant; that suffering and death are inevitable up and against the irrepressible joy that comes with living; Why don't we despair, he wonders... Why is it that the deliciousness of life is made all the more delicious because it is not forever... that the beauty of life is rendered all the more beautiful because it ends Now I'm a sucker for good poetry... and I'm going to call such a proclamation, Spirit Wisdom.... Wisdom that is word that when we hear it we know it is true; so says the Spirit... Death is the mother of beauty... that even death is swept up into the unfathomable beauty of God's creation... that doesn't mean that we don't grieve; that we experience loss, and

pain... but grief too is mother... the mother of healing... all is being transformed, brothers and sisters... all is being transformed into beauty, into the good.

Today is the feast of the Wisdom Spirit... the spirit among us that is wind... the spirit among us that is fire.... It is the Spirit that bears us in life and in death... It is the spirit that connects us to each other... It is the spirit that seeks justice, that engenders kindness and mercy... It is the Spirit that welcomes and breaks down divisions.... It is the Spirit that moves us to empathy for our neighbor... It is the Spirit that will turn grief into joy... despair into hope... sickness into health... It is the Spirit that overcomes death in its many guises... We, brothers and sisters are just simply called to trust it... Trust the Spirit... trust God's indwelling... It is not something we don't have, or don't deserve... it is the air we breathe... It is the wild and reckless air of love that we breathe; that we are made for... We just have to trust our nature... our true nature....

There are accounts of Christian Martyrs walking into the lions dens to their deaths imbued with courage, in utter joy... That is the mark of the Spirit... That is the final reckoning.... that we stand with joy in the face of death, knowing that all manner of thing is well.... Death has no hold on us... as people of the Spirit we will have always the last word... that love is stronger than death... that love will always bring us to wholeness and joy... that we are all one forever, the living and the dead... So says the Spirit.