

KGL+
Sermon
Trinity Boston
All Soul's Day
October 30th, 2022

Whenever you walk into this church, you are entering into a prayer-soaked place.

In this church, where people come in off the streets and drive from away to pray; where the faithful-to-be are baptized; where our loved ones are commended to God, you enter into a place which is full of the prayers of broken and bruised and beloved hearts.

If you don't find yourselves here on weekdays, I encourage you to come on occasion. Those who come for tourist reasons seem to find themselves in the pews after the requisite photos are taken. Sometimes they look up and around, but more often than not, they then begin to breathe more slowly; they sit back in the pew; place their hands up on the pew in front of them and bow their heads.

Prayer-soaked places are thin spaces—you can feel something shift when you enter them, if you let them. They are places where time feels unbounded; when the space can feel full, even when empty, but not full enough that there isn't space for you, and whatever baggage or emptiness that you have brought with you.

Whether we come as tourist, neighbor, funeral attendee, wedding party, Sunday congregation, every time we enter this space, we join in that holy soaking of prayer in these walls, pews and spaces. In the prayers or even just the thoughts and intentions of those who call this their church, we offer up the words which come to the surface of our hearts. Sometimes the words which have soaked into these walls are words of gratitude—the 'thank you's'. Sometimes, they are words of anger—the 'screw you's'. Sometimes they are words of 'now what?' or 'why?' or 'how?' or 'choose someone else'.

Often the words which are uttered in here aren't words but tears. This place—as fancy as it seems—is soaked through with the tears of grief and sorrow and frustration, with moments of sheer joy and laughter mixed in. All which are the lingering gifts of ordinary people, who have tried to walk in love—and succeeded, and failed, and with God's grace tried to try again. The prayers uttered in here are not those of the ones who are the 'good' ones, or the ones skilled at prayer or faith, or who get it right most of the time. They are the prayers of the people who were run of the mill, beautiful, broken humans who chose to talk to God, and consequentially, hallowed a space for us to talk to God, each in our own ways, in our own times.

On this All Soul's Day, there is something that the church refers to as 'Kairos'—God's time. It isn't the ticking of the clock, it isn't categorizing our existence into increments of twenty-four hours, and seven days and weeks and months. It is the time which exists within and through God alone, which means that in it, time can both conflate and expand simultaneously. We bring into our worship, into our prayer today, those who have soaked these walls with their prayers throughout the generations-- the names of those whom each of you has prayed for; the ones whom we have commended to God, and the ones who now find rest and wholeness in God's ever-reaching arms.

When I was an acolyte growing up—and forgive me if you have heard this story before—it was part of our practice to not wear watches during the Eucharist. In some ways, it was probably about aesthetics—it was the colorful Swatch Watch era after all—but what we were reminded was that during the Eucharist, we were on “Kairos” time. In kairos time there was no ‘back then’ and ‘to come’, but we are all merged into one moment in existence, where the living and the dead and those to come are all gathered into one place. One, thin, place at the altar and rail.

When we recall the words of Jesus and how he hold his disciples and friends how to remember him when he was gone—he told them to come together and break bread, and share the cup, and tell the stories of him. When we celebrate the Eucharist, that is what we do—we remember Jesus’ love for us, and in that act of remembrance, we are somehow knit together with all those who have gone before and are to come, with us kind of in the middle—those doing the work of remembering, of loving, of asserting that time and space does not diminish love and relationship.

Today, we will read the names of the dead from that altar as we enter into the sacrament. Some of these folks prayed in this place. Some of them prayed in other places. Some didn’t pray at all. But today, they are all gathered here, brought here with our hearts, gathered here because those we love and see no longer are not away—not disappeared, not gone—they are changed into God’s own presence through the mystery of the resurrection.

That is cold comfort for those who mourn and grieve and wrestle with those questions of ‘why’ and ‘why now’ and ‘I’m out, God’. And that is okay, because every moment of grief is a moment of love seeking a new place to land. Of entrance into the knowledge that our lives are not ones steeped in power and control, but of resilience borne of vulnerability. Death is often not fair. And also life is also often unfair. But fairness isn’t a hallmark of our God.

Love is. Accompaniment is. Continued, abiding presence.

Theology affirming that God is behind death and taking our loved ones from us isn’t particularly Anglican, nor the type of God I might worship on a regular basis. Death is what comes from literally being human, from living in an imperfect world, with a body made of the Spirit-breathed, finite humus of the earth. I’m not convicted that God giveth and taketh away, and I am grateful for that lack of conviction.

God, the Good Shepherd, allows us prayer-soaked places to be together. God’s love is not made known to us in the eschewing of pain, but in giving us thin spaces to know that we are never fully apart from those who have gone before us. In reminding us that nothing can separate us either from the love of God, or from the people through whom we have experienced the love and gentleness, the creativity, the joys of God. Recall that often God’s work comes through God’s people rather than a lightning bolt or epiphany.

The people we pray for today are a sliver of those who have made this place—and this people—the thin space it is. You will name your own, I’m sure, during that time—either out loud or in your hearts. You will bring them to this thin space—a place where the distance between us and them narrows and along with those who have gone before us, we can hold up our prayers, and our grief and our gratitude in the beautiful messiness which it is.

In our funeral service, we offer the Commendation of those who have died to God. It reads: “Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive them into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. *Amen.*”

In one breath, we are reminded that in life and in death, we are not alone—our Good Shepherd abides with us. Even when we are reluctant sheep needing to be herded. Even when we are lambs needed additional care and love. Even when we inevitably fall into sin and forgot who and whose we are. Because we are all of those things. Not one name that we will read today, save that of Jesus, is that of a perfect person. And our God doesn’t ask us to be perfect. God asks of us only that we continue to create thin spaces—through places or communities—where those who mourn can feel the closeness of God’s love when the one they love feels far away.

But the church isn’t only a building. It’s a people, gathered together, again and again, who are the true church. We—all of us—are meant to be the thin spaces of connection, and love and grace for those whose hearts need a moment of Kairos time. We will honor those stories around a table this morning—the Eucharist table and the tables downstairs as we create an altar of remembrance—offering our prayers too deep for words, better suited to the ethereal beauty of a Requiem. Our memories will be imperfect, and our grief may be messy, and that is okay. Our hearts writ large these days are called to be present to grief—not to control it.

So say the names of those you love, living or dead, or those to come. Name your joy, your anger, your grief at the injustice of illness and death, your discontent. Name it all, but name it—pray it—for in that prayer, we add our voices to the thousands of those who have done in the same in this place, in these pews, at this altar. And, in years to come—when our names are read at the altar on this day, when we, too, go to the encompassing arms of our God— we will have added a layer of prayer in this place, among these people—soaking it into the walls, and through the well worn wood of the pews, where hands have held on as knees have sunk down in prayer.

Add your layer of prayer here, friends.

Lay it on thick.

Allow these walls and people to hold it, and for our God to walk with us in it all.

For even at the grave we make our song, Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Amen.