

The Rev. Kristin Krantz
St. James', Mt. Airy
11/1/2015

All Saints' Day
Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-9
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

*So we have **known** and **believe** the **love** that God has for us.*

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

1 John 4:16

About seven and a half years ago I made a hospital visit to pray with and anoint a parishioner before a surgery.

Dave was one of the pillars of All Souls. He and his wife Sharon were long time members who had raised their children in the parish and still brought their grandchildren as often as they could. Dave had done just about everything in the parish over the years, and at that time was serving both on the Finance Committee and as a member of the Search Committee as the parish was in the process of calling a new Rector. Dave was what one might casually, and with affection, call 'a saint of the church.'

Time and memory are funny things. I don't remember what surgery Dave was having that day.

What I do remember as a young, and still fairly new priest, was the humbling experience of being invited into another's vulnerability. I remember Dave upbeat and in a hospital gown as we gathered. I asked him if he had a favorite scripture passage we could pray together. He said 1st John 4:16.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

Sharon, their daughters, and I waited in the waiting room until Dave came out of surgery. It went well and he was released to go home a few days later.

And then a phone call came that Dave was back in the hospital. He'd had what was likely a stroke caused by a blood clot. I rushed to the ER and was able to be with Dave and Sharon before he was transferred to another hospital that specialized in neurology.

As we waited for his transfer we spoke and prayed.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

The last thing I remember saying to him before he left was that God loved him and was with him. He grasped my hand, looked me in the eye, and said, "**I know.**"

I was trying to comfort him and offer reassurance, but like a saint, it was he who offered all of us comfort.

For saints are those people among us who realize before they die that neither death nor life, things present or things to come, can separate them from the love of God – and then they live accordingly.¹

The next couple of days were hard, with another surgery and many hours day and night spent at the hospital. Dave passed peacefully.

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We don't know how Lazarus died, only that his illness stretched over a few days, and by the time Jesus made his way back to the house that Mary, Martha, and Lazarus shared, he was gone.

We are told that upon hearing of Lazarus' death Jesus was disturbed in spirit and deeply moved – that he began to weep.

It is so easy to see the story of the raising of Lazarus as a dress rehearsal for Easter morning that we can overlook the profound story of the God who suffers and grieves with us.

Is it not a sign of abiding love that God stands alongside us, lending a shoulder to cry on and a comforting embrace? In those times of lament and despair, there is grace and mercy in knowing we are not alone.

Mary and Martha had called for Jesus to come and heal their brother, and yet he delayed. John gives it theological meaning, to teach about who Jesus was and is.

¹ Paraphrase – Cynthia A. Jarvis, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4*.

And yet when faced with his friend's death, Mary's grief rendered Jesus silent. Who he was, was someone silently grieving. Until, that is, he came to the tomb.

There we see Jesus as an agent and symbol of God's abiding love. Not because he brings Lazarus back to life.

No, his abiding love is rooted in the last words of our Gospel passage:
Unbind him, and let him go.

This is the lesson the saints teach us. That to live God's love we must wake from the death that is life without God, and live unbound by fear.²

We are to see in Lazarus that God is the victor over death, and then live as though death has no power over our days; as if the Eternal were *now*, because God *is*; as though we belong, in life and death, to God.³

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I had the privilege of Presiding at Dave's memorial service. It was a big service, with full choir and all the musicians, and a full church.

Like St. James', All Souls used real bread for communion. However there were always a few wafers consecrated too for those who wanted them.

² Paraphrase – Cynthia A. Jarvis, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4.*

³ Paraphrase – Cynthia A. Jarvis, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 4.*

At the end of the Eucharistic Prayer as I lifted the bread to break it – a symbol of life-death-resurrection all in one – I looked up at the loaf in my hands and somehow one of the wafers had pushed into the bread in such a way as to be sticking out perpendicular, giving the appearance that it was hovering in the air.

I heard a few people in the altar party and choir behind me gasp and then chuckle. And I paused for a moment too. Because in that moment it felt like not only the real presence of Jesus was there, but that Dave was too – always one who entered deep into worship, but also someone with a real sense of humor.

Saints know that death does not end, but only interrupts, life.

And that for those of us still on this side of the interruption, their witness and wisdom and humor makes a difference. It is part of what unbinds us and sets us free to abide in God's love.

So beloved, let us pray –

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

~ AMEN ~