

**BETWEEN THE CRADLE AND THE GRAVE
BLC – ALL SAINTS DAY – B. HULL SOMERS**

Isaiah 25:6-9, Revelation 21:1-6a, John 11:32-44

There was once a homeless man who was homeless by choice. He could have found affordable housing. He was down on his luck, but he was able-bodied and able to keep a job. He was homeless so he could do what he felt was his calling in the world. Although he was homeless, he did have a few friends with whom he really felt at home; some places he could crash for good food and to do laundry. One family in particular – a group of adult siblings who lived together – had a home where he was always welcome to be himself. Especially for this man who had given up so much – his home, his family, his future – it meant everything to have friends like that.

He was devastated then when one of his friends died after a brief illness. He got the news too late to say goodbye – no home address and all makes it difficult to find someone – and he ended up arriving four days after his friend's passing. His friend's sisters were hurt and frustrated by his tardiness. They were dear friends; why couldn't he have gotten there sooner? Why couldn't he be a predictable person who could be found when needed? After all, it might have made a difference.

It might have made a difference because the homeless man was Jesus. He had been known to heal and perform miracles, and yet he had not been there to heal his friend. To make matters worse, in the tradition at the time, the soul hangs around for three days so there is hope, but on the fourth day one is considered truly dead and beyond hope. Jesus arrived on the fourth day after his dear friend, Lazarus, had died. Way too late to do anything but grieve.

Lazarus's sister, Mary, was angry with Jesus: you should have been here, she said through tears, things might have turned out differently! The other sister, Martha, was always practical: she was disappointed but pragmatic, already dealing with the logistics of death.

I think the experience of Jesus' best friends, Mary, Martha and Lazarus, is a poignant description of what it feels like to be human and trying to trust Jesus when things go wrong. As Christians, we have our feelings of closeness and kinship with God – we have our beautiful experiences in prayer and worship and praise – our mountaintop times. We have our blessings where we know that we are among the best friends of our savior and then...the unthinkable happens, and we are left wondering what on earth happened to God. The pain is eviscerating and deep. The loss can feel unbearable.

I had the world's best dad. In April I ate Afghan food and chocolate cake with him on his porch in San Antonio for his 80th birthday. I watched as he joked with his grandkids, held my daughter on his lap and read her a book. Little did I know that it would be the last book he ever read to her, the last birthday celebrated, the last photos with the family gathered with him in them. Within three weeks he was dead of a massive stroke.

Life can be wonderful. Life can be devastating. And sometimes it feels like, in the midst of it all, Jesus shows up four days late.

Unlike Mary and Martha's brother Lazarus, my dad was not raised from the dead. He is gone. Ashes where his energetic limbs used to be, memories of what his laugh sounded like, his corny jokes, gone from us. It is easy to stop here and to allow the hounds of grief to take us down and to lose hope. With all the terrible mess of racism, hatred, and violence in the past weeks it is tempting to just sit down and weep, grieving and hopeless. There is nothing wrong

with grief. It is the healthy and appropriate underbelly of our love and relationship in this earthbound existence. There is nothing wrong with lament. Jesus himself wept when he heard that Lazarus was dead. But the Gospel promise is that Jesus, even as he grieved, turned hopelessness on its head. He looked death dead in the eye and turned a wake into a surprise party of life.

Lazarus's resurrection was just a teaser, an opening act to the main event. The main event is the promise and inspiration of Christian discipleship and All Saints Day – the death and resurrection of Jesus. The reason which grieving folk like myself can cling to hope even as the tears fall. Death is no match for God.

Today we celebrated and baptized a little chubby baby and two sweet and fierce young women, and we proclaimed over them the promise of God – that God loves them more than we can imagine, that God is with them – already in them, and that there will not a moment in their lives, including the moment that they die, where they are not completely loved, seen and accompanied by God. In a few minutes my family and two other families will gather at the cross to remember our dead. There will be tears and pain. We stand in the balance on this All Saints Day between the cradle and the grave, and we relentlessly cling to hope because of the one who wept at his friend's grave and then rose him up as a preamble to his own resurrection – where he obliterated hopelessness and fear forever. We proclaim over these children, for whom we would gladly die if it would save them from harm, that God's work and love and grace means something for them as they walk in this world and into the eternal arms of God. It means something in all seasons – in joy, grief and despair. It means something even when it feels like we have lost everything.

We stand in the balance between our grief at those we have lost and our immense joy for the bright future before us and we choose to live in God's grace and love; to promise our children to it; to let go of our loved ones who have died into it; to let our fear be dissolved in it.

We, saints of God, are between the already and not yet. Between the resurrection of Christ and the day when the promise from our Isaiah and Revelation texts come to pass, and there is no more grief or pain or shooting up of synagogues or grocery stores or yoga studios.

Being between the already and not yet and we have one task before us: how will we live as followers of Christ in this meantime? To what extent will we allow the audacious hope and radical love of God to be worked out in our lives and actions and speech? How can we live in the promise of the resurrection even as we know that we have expiration dates? How will we infuse these children, who we just promised to uphold in the faith, with a Godly example of perseverance and love and forgiveness and reconciliation?

It will take great courage. I have to apologize to you all. Last week I jokingly said you would not be the crew I would choose for a rumble... I meant a West Side Story kind of rumble with switchblades... and I went on to say that you are a perfect crew to love the world. But many of you, on your way out and at coffee hour, corrected me and reminded me that you are actually pretty amazing in rumbles too, if it comes to that.

Well, I guess I'll take you up on that. Because it is going to take every ounce of courage, rebellion, rumble, passion, energy and moxie that we have to stand up against the hopelessness, apathy, hatred and bigotry of the world. Church, are you ready to rumble?

Our God authored life. Our God brings life out of everything, even death. Our God has set us free and filled us with unending supplies of grace so it is time to live like it, and that, my beautiful siblings in Christ, will cause a rumble.

To raise these girls that we just baptized to know that they can change the world in God's love and to give them the authority to stand up to evil and to at times rumble against it, it will take courage, and it will cause a stir. Are we willing to cause a stir for the Kingdom?

The stone that rolled away and set Lazarus free rumbled the earth, allowing life to spring forth. How will we live this one beautiful life that we have been gifted as followers of Jesus? Connect to the source. Pray. Worship. Be nourished at the table. Pay attention to beauty. Pay attention to grief. Love each other. Forgive. Stand up against evil. Trust God. Create. Sing. Laugh. Help people. Say we are sorry. Never stop growing and changing. Wage joy and peace. Speak hope. We hang in the balance between the cradle and the grave embedded in the hope of the resurrection.

Saints, it's time to rumble. Amen.

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