Malcolm Clemens Young Isaiah 25:6-9

Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, CA 2B34 Psalm 130

25 Pentecost (Proper 28B) 11:00 a.m. Eucharist 1 Thess. 4:13-18

Sunday 14 November 2021 All Souls (Fouré) Requiem Mark 13:1-8

**Death and Waking Up**

*“For the Lord… with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven and the dead in Christ will rise…”* (1 Thess. 4).

Yesterday in the brilliant fall colors and dazzling warm light of Los Altos we buried my friend Jim McKnight in the columbarium of our old church. Jim and I had a strange relationship. He is my parent’s age. We first met when he was in his fifties and full of wisdom. And yet he had just been ordained the year before and so he didn’t know what I did about running churches.

For ten years he was my assistant rector. I don’t know if I’ll ever work so closely with anyone again and we accomplished such surprising things together. He had a wry sense of humor, loved opera. He was humble, dutiful, faithful, very orderly, methodical, detail-oriented, kind, thoughtful, a little high-strung, kind of tense.

Jim was still fairly corporate. He would have joked that he was a little neurotic but he wasn’t. I still carry lots of advice from him in my thoughts but the first thing that comes to mind is how he said, “trust the process.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

I had known everyone in that small gathering of people for twenty years. As I was talking about Jim, I turned to Claire the new rector. I tried to thank her for looking after so many people that I loved, but as I looked over to say this to her I saw all the names on the niches and I started crying.

There was Jennifer a forty year old opera singer who I visited every week for the last year before she died of ALS. There was a nineteen year old who had been in our youth group and then overdosed after she started college. There were adversaries who didn’t like me because I was starting a school. There was a hundred year old man who we all agreed had the strongest handshake of anyone we’d met.[[2]](#endnote-2)

There was Howard whose last act on the planet was to supervise me as I planted a special plum tree in the garden before he passed away sweetly as he napped. There were so many colleagues who volunteered and worked together with us housing people who lived on the streets, our ministry at the VA hospital and various other outreach projects. I had been with many of them on the day they died.

Every year Grace Cathedral makes this extraordinary offering, this Sung Requiem for All Souls. I think many of us will experience those same feelings that I had in the Columbarium. Perhaps we will remember a sense of horror in the face of tragic and untimely deaths, loneliness or sorrow at being separated from people we thought we could never do without. But you may also feel joy in remembering people who mattered so greatly to you and gratitude for that wonderful uniqueness that others bring into our lives.

At this point I want to thank Ben Bachmann, Chris Keady and the entire Men and Boys Choir. Today they will bring us to a place of healing that we would never be able to find on our own.

In this morning’s Gospel Jesus first addresses the crowds and then privately answers his friends’ questions. But these words are not really for them. Scholars believe that Mark wrote this in the midst of one of the most terrifying and traumatic moments in the history of the Jewish people.

Not long ago I memorized Psalm 84. It is a kind of love song to the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem. For them it was the sacred heart of the world. The psalm begins with this verse, “How dear to me is your dwelling, O Lord of hosts! My soul has a desire and longing for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh rejoice in the living God.”[[3]](#endnote-3) For me this is a love song about Grace Cathedral, for them it was about the very center of their faith.

King Herod the Great began building the third temple in 20 BCE. It was still under construction during Jesus’ life and only completed in 63 AD. It took eighty years to build. Imagine the stones that his disciples admired so much. They were 35 feet long, 18 feet wide and 12 feet high. And then only seven years after finishing the great Temple the Roman Empire crushed a rebellion in the Holy Land. They utterly destroyed the Temple.

In the face of terrible suffering and what seemed to be the destruction of a people, a religion, a whole way of existing in the world. Jesus gives us three words of tremendous hope. First, he warns us to beware of worshiping the wrong thing. We can love power or a political identity or wealth in a way that leads us away from God. Second, he invites us to regard whatever is troubling us now in a new light. Whatever you are mourning or worried about, whatever makes you afraid may be a kind of birth pang as you come into something wonderful.

We took our friend Rita Semel out to lunch yesterday to celebrate her one hundredth birthday. She told us that at the heart all religions share the same impulse toward tikkun olam, the repair of the world. Even our suffering may be the means for us to contribute to that work of healing.

Finally, Jesus asks us to keep awake. This world has great beauty and many surprising acts of love. There is so much to wonder about, so many signs of hope if we will let ourselves receive God’s grace and see things as they are.

The nineteenth century writer Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) describes himself primarily as a chanticleer, as the rooster trying to wake everyone up. In his book *Walden* before that famous passage about going to the woods to live deliberately, Thoreau writes, “To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was fully awake. How could I have looked him in the face?”[[4]](#endnote-4)

Thoreau goes on and writes, “We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake… I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life by a conscious endeavor. It is something to be able to paint a particular picture, or to carve a statue, and so to make a few objects beautiful; but it is far more glorious to carve and paint the very atmosphere and medium through which we look, which morally we can do. To affect the quality of the day, that is the highest of the arts.”

Yesterday in the Christ Church Columbarium I suddenly became more awake. In that instant I saw more fully the connections I had with people who I loved so deeply. Together we had set out to repair the world and we succeeded beyond our expectations. For an instant I realized that God through Christ is bringing all things to completion.

Photographs:
Christ Church

Grace Cathedral Choir

Henry David Thoreau

1. I suppose he was the Felix Unger and I was the Oscar Madison in our odd couple. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. There was the sweetest man who was my age but because of a disability seemed more like a ten year old. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. This is from the Psalter in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (707). [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971) 90. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)