**We Will Remember**

October 26, 2024

Rev. Christine E. Burns

It’s All Saints, Not Some Saints

*Blessed are those who mourn,  
    for they shall be comforted.* Matthew 5:4

Today is a day in the church when we do something counter-cultural. We remember. We remember those who have passed on to life eternal. We talk about death, dying, saints and sinners and we lift those who mourn. This is not something our youth culture approves of, but we have the strength of thousands of years of tradition to draw upon to do this work of remembering.

I invited each of you to place white rose petals in a bowl of water as you lifted prayers and remembered people that you love who are no longer here. As I preach, look at that bowl or out the windows and listen to my words and let your mind go where it needs to go as you remember.

Let me begin today’s meditation with a story about my friend and colleague Jessica. Jessica longed for a baby in a way that defied any “no” that got in her way. As a single woman, she chose to be a single parent. She went through the rigorous challenges of IVF and finally, with the gift of an embryo, she was pregnant with her deeply desired and loved child. The pregnancy went well until she went into early labor. Jessica delivered her beautiful baby girl, Penelope, and she lived for five days. Penelope’s death was heart-breaking.

How do you recover after the loss of a child? Jessica fiercely said Penelope’s name over and over. She shared her story, and this became something that helped forge her. As part of her intentional grieving, Jessica decided to walk the Camino de Santiago in Spain. She began her journey of 516 kilometers with a heavy pack and an even heavier heart. Along the path, her feet blistered, and her tears flowed. She shared the story of Penelope with her fellow walkers and this sharing of Penelope’s story blessed her and blessed all those who learned of this tiny baby gone too soon. Jessica wrote this as her final Facebook post at the end of her 516-mile trek along the Camino to reach Santiago. “My Camino has ended. For now. I did not make it to the ocean, but this leaves me something to return to. I met amazing people, learned we are all a little lost, a little broken, and together we can connect through that brokenness. I saw people willing to put it all out there, people who have been through hell and still bear the scars. Over and over, I told people Penelope’s story. I spread her ashes all along the way and felt her with me throughout. I am stronger in body and spirit than I was, and I know there are still moments awaiting me that will make me feel like no time has passed since I held my daughter and felt her sleep against my heart. I carry her heart; I carry it in mine.” (Facebook April 20, 2022, Galicia, Spain)

Jessica continues to share the story of her beloved baby Penelope. And she has been blessed with a second child. Nori is now a year and half. She tells the story of Penelope to her daughter Nori; and reminds us to all to keep saying Penelope’s name.

Today’s Scripture lesson comes from the Beatitudes in Matthew. Each sentence begins with “you are blessed.” What does it mean to be blessed? There is a lot of bad theology out there and we don’t want to participate in anything that would hurt someone, especially someone who is grieving. The Hebrew word for blessed is “*ashar*” which means to find the right road. To be blessed is to find the right road, the road that is the right way to God, the holy, the divine spirit. All along the Camino there are symbols pointing the pilgrim to the path, the right road. People will help you to make sure you do not get lost. People travel with all variety of abilities. Some go the entire distance, and others do what they can do with physical limitations. A church member just returned from the Camino and said that people traveled the road using wheelchairs, canes, crutches and feet. It is a road for everyone.

Here is a translation of the Beatitudes for the road.

“You are on the road toward God when you mourn, for you will be comforted.”

“You are on the road toward the Holy when you are merciful, for you will receive mercy.”

“You are on the road toward God when you are a peacemaker, for you will be called a child of God.”

“You are on road toward the Divine when you are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for yours is the Realm of Divine here and now.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

Today’s Special song is John Prine’s “I Remember Everything.” This song was written in 2019 and recorded in his living room May 8, 2019. Prine’s song was released in June 2020, two months after he died of Covid. The song won two Grammys, but more importantly than any award, the lyrics capture for us what it means to remember. Today I am inviting you to remember the saints and loved one in your life who have passed on to life eternal.

Prine’s lyrics invite us to reflect and remember. He sings

* “I remember every tree/every single blade of grass/ holds a special place for me.”
* “I remember everything, things I can't forget  
  The way you turned and smiled on me on the night that we first met
* “I miss you in the morning light like roses miss the dew”

Music helps when we remember. Music helps us remember those we love and have lost. When I remember family members who have died, I love to listen to their favorite songs and smile or cry, depending on my mood.

How shall we remember? In whatever ways serve us best.

Each year when we celebrate and remember the lives of the saints of West Parish who have passed on to life eternal, I read their names allowed. Keep saying the names of those you love as well. Tell their stories.

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| Joyce Joakim |
| Jessica Lynn Small |
| Jean Birch |
| John Doriss |
| Shirley Whitelaw |
| Shirley Howland Canning |
| Richard Edward Canning, Jr. |
| Ernie Walsh |
| Hilda Goerhing |
| Barbara Walsh |

One of the things I love to do when I remember my mom is pull out her recipe books and make her favorite recipes. I love to read the comments she put on the top of the recipes. My favorite comments are the ones that say “yucky” or “horrible.” I know that I will never make that recipe. It’s so helpful to have her commentary from the past informing my present.

Today is a day we remember. One thing that has been very helpful for our older girls who lost their mother to breast cancer is watching videos of themselves as children and seeing and hearing their mom’s voice. One of the things that our oldest daughter has done as she lives with grief is works with children who have also lost someone through a program called Comfort Zone Camps.

I love Comfort Zone Camps guidance on how to talk about death. Appropriate responses include “I am so sorry for your loss,” “my thoughts are with you,” “you’re not alone in your grief,” “it’s ok to feel whatever you are feeling right now.” If you knew the person, share positive memories. Grief is a journey, and you do not have to go through it alone. Grief has no timeline. It takes the time it takes, and you may feel grief the rest of your life.

May you feel accompanied by God on this journey. May you always know that the person or people who have died are loved and will always be loved by God and you. And may we feel free to have the range of emotions dwell within us. Hopefully, when we sing songs like John Prine’s “I Remember Everything” we find comfort in remembering.

May you be blessed and loved today and always. Amen.

1. Palmer, Earl F. Feasting on the Word, Year A, Volume 4, page 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)