

## **The Burial of the Dead**

Wisdom 3:1-9

Psalm 46

Revelation 21:1-7

John 11:17-27

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In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

A miracle occurred this morning. Did you notice? A miracle. Did you see? It's a new day. Slowly, in the east, the sun crept above the horizon, spent some hours hiding above the clouds, and is now making its way beyond the west. A miracle. I was recently challenged by someone very wise to consider how life might be different if I were to think of today as a gift, and not a given. Today, and every day that the sun rises and the world wakes from sleep. Tomorrow? Who knows? But today—a gift. For you see, life is a terminal condition, a sobering fact that I think everyone in this room understands, some probably better than others. The sun did not have to come up today. You did not have to be here. But it did, and you are. A gift.

Why might this way of seeing the world be so valuable? Why is this important to think about tonight? Maybe because it's good to live in the present? Or because gratitude is an orientation that directs our lives for the better? Yes, both are true. But I wonder if there is something else to found in treating today as a precious gift. You see, some gifts are meant to be put on a shelf and enjoyed. Like a fireplace mantel full of faces smiling out of picture frames. But other gifts are to be used. What if today is a gift for tomorrow? When tomorrow comes, if it does, we'll have today. We can get through today because we had yesterday. Every gifted day—provision for the next. All by God's grace.

Life seems to be like that, too. Provision in this life for the next. Gifts—the most ordinary things. Gifts like bodies and minds that can do amazing things. Gifts like this earth and its fragile beauty. Gifts like sacraments—the body and blood, the water of Baptism. Gifts like love—family, friends, neighbors. Gifts like a childhood spent on a quiet farm in Massachusetts. An education to hone the mind of an engineer. A partner found in a land far from home. A new home. Three beautiful children. Eleven grandchildren. A fishing spot. A hunting dog. A house built from scratch that will never quite be complete. An RV and an eager spirit to travel far and wide for baseball games. Patience to sit through long swim meets. Hands to care for a wife of fifty years who is struggling to remember his name. All gifts.

These are the gifts—the provision—that have prepared Grandpa (note on Richard?) for this day. Grandpa's present—his today—is now with God, just as it's always been, but in a new way. And what a gift that must be, to greet the miracle of the new day with the saints.

For us here, however, some days don't feel like a gift. Maybe this day is like that for you. Maybe you're sad. Maybe you're angry. Maybe you don't know what to feel, or you feel guilty for how you do or don't feel. Maybe you're feeling okay. Maybe you feel proud or grateful or just tired.

Whatever today brings for you, for good or for ill, I hope that one day you may see it as a gift. A gift from God for some time in your future when you'll need it. I hope that one day you'll wake up and find that the worst day of your life has been transformed—inexplicably and without warning—into something new, into something different, into love or light or beauty. Into redemption. God has a remarkable way—a way that if we're honest sometimes seems very cruel—but a remarkable way nonetheless of turning suffering into joy. Mourning into dancing. Darkness into light. Death into life. Like when a dark and formless void becomes “It was very good.” Or when the pain and abandonment and shame of Good Friday becomes the Alleluia of Easter morning. This is our hope. This is our hope as followers of a crucified and risen Lord. This is the hope of the entire creation.

And it's not just a hope for tomorrow. For some future day we can't see or know anything about. It's not just the hope of a story told long ago. It's for today. Because today—this miracle—is the only day we have. In the bit of John's Gospel that we just heard read, Jesus has arrived at the tomb of his friend Lazarus. And he's late. “Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ ...Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.’”

Jesus does not say I will be the resurrection and the life. He does not say I was the resurrection. He says I am the resurrection. I am the resurrection now. Today. Yes, Lazarus will be raised—that day from his earthly grave and then again with all the saints. Yes, Martha, you are looking for the resurrection on the last day—but the resurrection is standing right in front of you! Right in front of Martha stands God's answer to a world of death. God's answer to our deepest darkness, our deepest sorrow, our deepest sin. I am the resurrection and the life. Jesus says this before he is crucified—before he rises from the dead on Easter morning. God's story does not have a beginning, middle, or end. God sees all our days—our good days and our bad. Our tragedies and our triumphs. The days that feel like a miracle and the ones we would rather forget. To all of those days, Jesus says I am the resurrection and the life. In Jesus, God confronts our lives with this truth. In Jesus, God confronts a world of pain and injustice. God confronts a world of cancer and dementia. God confronts a world of sin and death. I am the resurrection and the life.

And by God's grace, and nothing else, we share in that resurrection now. Even today. Even in the grave. Let us cling to that grace, and give God thanks. For the gift of today. For the gift of Grandpa. For the gift of abundant life in Jesus Christ. Amen.