

All Souls Day 2017

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*When I am down, and, oh, my soul, so weary
When troubles come, and my heart burdened be
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence
Until you come and sit awhile with me*

*You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains
You raise me up to walk on stormy seas
I am strong when I am on your shoulders
You raise me up to more than I can be*

I first became aware of this song back in 2003, when Josh Groban included it on one of his albums. I played that song over and over again.

But I don't listen to it very often any more. Why? Because six years ago, when my mom was going through her cancer treatments, there were times when she would grow weary from the chemo and radiation. So she would go into her room... and play this song on her CD player. Sometimes, the volume was very loud. Now I understand why – she turned up the volume so we could not hear her crying.

Sometimes, when I hear this song, I think about all the things that mom and I did NOT get to do because she died at the age of 70. I think about her desire to go to Jerusalem, to see the places where Jesus walked.

When mom was in treatment, she told me that she wanted to get better because she had projects at church she wanted to complete. Work she had begun, goals she had set. She wanted to bring them all to completion.

But she didn't get there. She didn't finish every task, or complete every project. She had hopes that were not going to see fulfillment here on earth.

As I look at the faces of the people pictured around our altar tonight, I wonder... how many of our deceased loved ones, as they approached their last breath, were whispering to God: "I'm not ready yet. I still have things to do. I'm not finished."

True – some people can look back over their life, and they say with great gratitude and trust, “I am ready when the Lord calls me.”

But what about the people who were killed in New York this week, or in Las Vegas last month? What about the people who die in earthquakes or wildfires? What about the 16 year old killed in a car accident, the 23 year old who dies of an overdose, the 40 year old who discovers aggressive cancer? They might say to God: “Not yet. I’m not done.”

And, for those who remain, isn’t our grief made more acute because we were not *ready* to say goodbye? We started the journey together – but we didn’t make it all the way.

Well, even someone as holy as Moses seems to have that experience, at least in tonight’s first reading. Think of all that Moses did for God! He was Pharaoh’s protégé in Egypt, but he left that behind when he realized that he was a Hebrew.

As Moses wandered, God found him on the mountaintop, and spoke to him from the burning bush. Moses realized that God was calling him to a difficult vocation: convince Pharaoh to set the Israelites free, then lead the Israelites to the Promised Land.

At every turn, Moses faced opposition, first from Pharaoh, and then from his own people.

Moses led those stubborn people from slavery toward the Promised Land. But as we heard in tonight’s first reading, God says to Moses: “you are not going to get there. I will let you *glimpse* the Promised Land, but you won’t *get* it. You’ve been working hard to get there... but your life will end before your search is complete.”

So, one of God’s most faithful servants dies without the completion of all his work, or the fulfillment of all his hopes.

We also hear about people’s hopes in Luke’s Gospel. In this Gospel passage, there are THREE of the most heartbreaking words in the entire Bible. And those three words are: “we *were* hoping.”

Two disciples of Jesus were walking away from Jerusalem, downcast because their friend had been brutally crucified and buried in a tomb.

Jesus’ words had made them dream. Jesus’ miracles made them hope. Maybe, just maybe, God was finally going to fulfill his promises. Maybe the world was really going to change for the better.

Then it all fell apart. And for some reason, Cleopas and his companion started walking *away* from the scene of the tragedy, *toward* a town called Emmaus. They were joined on that sad journey by someone they did not recognize. And as they tell this ‘stranger’ about their friend Jesus, they say those three sad words: “We *had* hoped... we *were* hoping...”

Notice - PAST tense. Their hope was in the *past*. Apparently, the work that Jesus started wasn’t going to get done. The dreams he unleashed were not coming true. “We *were* hoping...”

From Moses in the desert, to the disciples near Emmaus, to the people pictured around the altar, to my mother during her cancer treatments... many people of faith enter into the mystery of death not quite finished, not quite fulfilled, not quite having reached our goals.

Now, that can either lead us to despair, or it can lead us back to the Scriptures... to discover the good news.

Did you notice? The two disciples on the road to Emmaus had lost their hope. But, *hope found them*. The two disciples saw Jesus die. But he found them, risen and walking the journey with them. They felt lost. He came and found them. They felt unfulfilled. He filled them with new life.

Maybe we human beings don’t finish all our work, because the Lord is the one who completes that work within us. Maybe we don’t have to exhaust ourselves, completing every task, finishing every project, getting ourselves ready. Maybe the Lord is saying to us, “you will only be complete when you let me complete you. You will only be finished when you let me finish in you. You will only be ready if you let me embrace you in my love.”

We are never quite ready. But if we confess that, we can experience the peace and freedom which happens when God calls us by name and makes us whole.

The Book of Revelation has a poetic image which summarizes all this. Revelation describes what it will be like when God redeems everything.

You have to remember: faithful Jewish people had a heart-felt hope that they would be able to walk from their homes, and go to Jerusalem to celebrate the high holy days each year. Faithful Jews felt a sense of fulfilment if they were able to make that journey to the holy city. If they couldn’t get there, they would say to each other – ‘next year in Jerusalem.’ They wanted to go to the holy city.

But in our reading from Revelation, we don’t hear about human beings going to Jerusalem. We

hear about *Jerusalem coming to us!* We don't hear about humans completing our arduous journey: we hear how God brings the holy city to where we are. We don't have to find God. God finds us.

The sad disciples on the road to Emmaus didn't have to go find Jesus. The risen Jesus found them.

Moses didn't figure out where God was. God found him, in the burning bush.

Our loved ones may have said to themselves, "Am I ready? How will I find my way to Christ?" But they did not have to find their way to Christ. Christ found his way to them. And he forgave their sins. And made them whole. And gave them a peace they could not have dreamed of.

Which brings me back to my mom's song. The refrain says: "You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains, you raise me up, to walk on stormy seas."

And how do we find that person who raises us up?

We don't. The Raiser-Upper finds us. As the song says:

*When I am down and oh my soul so weary
When troubles come and my heart burdened be
Then I am still and wait here in the silence
until you come and sit awhile with me.*

Until *you come* and sit awhile with me.

This All Souls night, the One who raises us up comes and sits with us. In the silence. In the music. In this community and in the Eucharist.

And when He comes and sits awhile with us, he brings with him all of those we have loved... all those he has raised up.