

Thomas R. Cook
Sermon #789 St. Stephen's Church – Edina, Minnesota
12:00 Noonday Prayers and 7:00 p.m. Celebration of the Holy Eucharist
All Faithful Departed – November 2, 2018

“Reasons...”

Scripture: AFD

Death is hard enough at the times it intrudes upon our lives. So why would a perfectly okay gathering of the living voluntarily give up a portion of a perfectly good day in order to enter into the challenging memory of death? I can think of some reasons...

... and I may as well begin with love. Love, as the apostle Paul teaches us, is patient and kind; not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. [And] Love... never... ends.” Not because of death; not by the passage of time. One reason we might gather on this day is for love... the ongoing love of those who have gone before us.

Perhaps another reason to be together to remember the dead is... hope. Hope that, in God's providence, our loved ones are well. That they are at peace, and not gone from us forever. Hope in the promises of our faith that the day of Resurrection

will come when we are reunited with the ones we love, and that all shall indeed be well.

But life and death are rarely simple things. And I wonder if another reason some gather this day for the departed is for reconciliation. For the desire that the things we had hoped for in life, but that did not come to pass, or any hurts and disappointments we carry from times with the departed, might be further and continually healed in us in the time of this life. That we can let go things done and left undone, in order to know or share forgiveness and be healed.

I think some might gather on this day because we still have questions. Why? Why did things unfold in the ways they did? Why is someone I so deeply love no longer living? Why did they have to die? And I don't know that the answers to such questions remain elusive to us in this life. But I think there remains something faithful in the asking, something deeply human about seeking for understanding, asking in faith and humility, so as not to be overcome by bitterness or spite, but rather to give voice to our earnest complaint, and to live and love in the midst of things we do not understand.

And I know one reason certainly that I choose to gather on this day with others, and a reason I hope I share with you all, is... peace. Peace for me. Peace for

you. Peace in the memory of our loved ones. The ability to recollect that which is good, and to smile even through tears when grief lies heavy upon us. I never want to stop missing those that I love, but I do want to be at peace even while missing them.

I hope this time today can be one in which we can quiet the mind, still the soul, rest in the presence of the One who has given us life, and acknowledge our own mortality, so that our own impending death will not seem to us solely the end of all things, but rather that one thing which we all do that unites us with each other and those who have gone before us. Like what we say in our Eucharistic prayer at the time of death: *For to us, life is changed, not ended, and when our mortal body lies in death, there is prepared for us a dwelling place eternal in the heavens.*

I opened this reflection by asking why a perfectly okay gathering of the living would voluntarily give up a portion of a perfectly good day in order to enter into the challenging memory of death. But really what we are doing in this time is giving faithfully a portion of our day to enter into the challenging memory of life and the people we love who have gone before us. I know each of us has our own reasons to be here, and I pray that each of us receives all that we need to live on, to remember what is good, and to love.