

when god lets my body be  
From each brave eye shall sprout a tree  
fruit dangles therefrom  
the purpled world will dance upon  
Between my lips which did sing  
a rose shall beget the spring  
that maidens whom passions wastes  
will lay between their little breasts  
My strong fingers beneath the snow  
Into strenuous birds shall go  
my love walking in the grass  
their wings will touch with their face  
and all the while shall my heart be  
With the bulge and nuzzle of the sea

E.E. Cummings

Thanks to Brian for challenging us with this ee cummings poem this morning. E.E. Cummings was a 20<sup>th</sup> century poet whose poems were considered avant-garde, daring experiments with language. Brian's setting beautifully captures the oddness of his word patterns. But why would we include it in our worship this morning?

Critic Bethany Dumas remarks that Cummings' word patterns "have the effect of jarring the reader, of forcing him to examine experience with fresh eyes." My personal hope is that every Sunday God will open the eyes and ears of our hearts so that we may examine our experience with fresh eyes and find God therein. Which is why we have challenged ourselves with this poem.<sup>1</sup> So that we may look with fresh eyes.

'When God lets my body be' is a poem of resurrection. A poem which talks about the physicality of death and decay in a way that we might

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/e-e-cummings>

find ghoulish but which is as much a part of life as the best, most physically alive activity that we can imagine. Cummings points out that it is God who animates our bodies and that when the time comes for the breath of God to leave us and let our bodies be, they decay, turn into soil, and provide fertilizer for trees and roses, and food for birds. And then we eat the fruit of the trees, we enjoy the roses and the birds touch the essence of love.

This is the way of life. Food is necessary for life and all food comes from death. Even the most basic plants get their life from the sun which is gradually burning up and, in the process, producing the heat and light which plants use for photosynthesis. It is not too much of a stretch to say that life on planet Earth depends on the dying of the Sun. It is a slow death, expected to take 7 or 8 billion years, but at some time the energy of the Sun will be exhausted. The Sun will be dead.

God is the creator and animator of life and so God too is the creator of death. Yet death itself provides life. Our faith is based on this simple truth. In Jesus' death we find hope. But it is not just his death, it is also his resurrection. Today's gospel reading about the resuscitation of Lazarus is important to remind us that Jesus has power over death, but even after he came back to life Lazarus was still mortal. Jesus' resurrection leads to immortality and to his promise that we too will join him in the next dimension.

Today we celebrate All Saints and All Souls – the great festivals of the fall as the light wanes and the days grow shorter – we remind ourselves of death *and* resurrection by thinking about those who have gone before. We remind ourselves of the heritage that we share in the Communion of Saints.

This has been a year of loss. Several of us have lost parents just in the past couple of months; Anne Kanter's father, Barbara Skipper's

stepfather and Betsey Bruner's mother who lived in Los Osos for almost fifty years and died just a few days after her 105<sup>th</sup> birthday; and we have lost companion animals – Smokey, Chewie and Cat to mention just three.

We have lost those who have died and we have lost those who moved away from us physically or emotionally. The pandemic has changed the way we live and, in the process, has weakened ties of friendship since we cannot be so easily together and have had to make hard choices about distancing and staying within safe bubbles. We have lost our easy way of being church together. Many of us have had significant changes in our health or jobs and are grieving for the way life used to be. I doubt that anyone in this room has been untouched by grief this year.

It is ok to grieve. Grieving is part of being human. In today's gospel, Jesus himself wept. As much as we may be mentally comfortable and accepting of death and of change, grief for those we have lost and for what we have lost is normal and natural. The more quickly we accept grief as part of the process of living, the more easily we can let it go.

Presumably, in today's Gospel reading, Jesus knew that he was going to raise Lazarus but he still experienced grief. It was all around him, it must have been overwhelming; he just accepted it and let himself cry. We can speculate on the grief he may have been feeling as he approached his death and the horrors of the cross; perhaps that was what started the tears. We don't know but we can know that just as we try to imitate Jesus in love and service so we also can allow ourselves to imitate him in expressing our grief.

We know that Jesus faced death anxiety in the Garden of Gethsemane, sweating blood before his arrest. Death anxiety is something many of us face as we experience the death of others around us – how will it be for me? Will there be pain? Will I be alone? We don't know.

But we don't need to stop there, caught in the anxiety. Grief and loss and death are only part of the story. We are resurrection people. We are resurrection people who know that when God lets our bodies be, life continues not just in the trees, roses and birds but in the coming and already present Reign of God. Cummings says "all the while shall my heart be/ With the bulge and nuzzle of the sea." We know that our hearts and souls are not in the sea, not drops in a vast ocean of consciousness but held in sacred trust by the living God.

In our second reading we heard the amazing and inspiring words of St John the Divine,

"I saw a new heaven and a new earth... and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,

"... Death will be no more;  
mourning and crying and pain will be no more,  
for the first things have passed away."

And the one who was seated on the throne said, "See, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this, for these words are trustworthy and true."

This is our hope. Not only will *death* be no more but also mourning and crying and pain.

And we are connected to the saints who have gone before us. Each one has contributed to our well-being, to the well-being of life on this earth. Each one has done so by loving God and their neighbor to the best of their ability. When we worship God, especially when we worship God together, we are not alone, we are joining in their worship, we are linked with them in the great cosmic song of praise and thanksgiving.

In a moment we will honor those who are one with us in the mystical Communion of Saints as we see some of their faces and later read their

names together. Many of these people are those who built this church, loving and serving God in this expression of the Body of Christ. Others are family members.

We honor these people not just as those who have lived and loved and passed on, but as siblings in Christ, as some of those who walk the path with us today. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” (Heb: 12.1) “Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses.” We are the saints living life in this dimension; they are the saints living the same life of love, surrender and service in the next dimension.

Together, we are co-creating the new heaven and the new earth. We live in hope that even as things in this life, in this world, are changing and life as we have known it is threatened and we seem powerless to stop it... even then we are not alone because we are beloved of the God who walks every step of the way with us, and we are connected to the great Communion of Saints working to co-create the new heaven and the new earth.

Good things *are* happening and we are part of the future where the Saints will rise in glory. We are the resurrection people.