

Nov 3, 2024 All Saints' Day

Pr. Steve

Texts: Isaiah 25: 6-8; Revelation 21:1-6; Mark 12: 28-34

In the name of God, Abba/Imma, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

'*So Far Away*', such a beautiful song. It is that plaintive tone which really makes us feel the distance, haunting, and the gap we feel inside, and also that sense of connection and that reaching out and that beckoning to those whom we still love—so far away.

I was taken when I came across this recently. The Zulu language would translate 'far away' with this phrase: '*There where someone cries out, 'O Mother, I am lost.' Far away. 'Mother, I am lost.'*' The Fuegians, (an indigenous tribe from Tierra del Fuego, the southern-most tip of South America) have a seven-syllable word that means 'far away' but is translated into English like this: '*They stare at one another, each waiting for the other to volunteer to do what both wish but are not able to do.*' This is not primitive. It is deep, emotional, and powerful. '*Far away they stare at one other, each longing for the other to volunteer to do what both wish but are not able to do.*' Far away.

Maybe the real distances in life are not geographical. It's the distance between our hearts—the unwillingness to connect, the distance that prevents us from understanding each other—those are the distances which are so far away.

That distance also includes time and space. Time is not linear, is it? We know that. People can go backwards all the time. Time is not linear, nor is time cyclical. We don't repeat the same things over and over. No. I like the definition that time is seasonal. It is an environment that embraces us. It may carry rhythms, similar rhythms from the past, but it's always about new discoveries.

This is a season of pumpkins, and chills, and darkness, and soup, and fireplaces and hunkering down. It's the season when we get to discover new things through old patterns. Thanksgiving will not be the same as last year's Thanksgiving.

And space, space we think of as neutral. 'There's just Space'. No there isn't! There's empty space like the void. There is the empty space of '*Nothing's happening right now.*' There is the empty space of stillness and quiet and calm. There is dark space which is intimidating. There is the dark space of the night sky which is intriguing. And there is sacred space where we experience the presence.

Take a look at your Bulletin cover, please.

That is the oldest tree on the planet. It is 3,000 years old, in Venda. Mark Howard and I crawled inside the tree from which this photo was taken. 18 people can live inside of this Baobab tree. It looks like a tree, but when you touch it, it feels like granite. It's a place of great presence. You stand there, and it's not the mind or the heart, it's in the gut that you just are immersed in the presence. Like God. Like God who is hidden—and present—sometimes in friends, or children, or laughter and beauty. But even in times of crisis, God is hidden and present, which we simply experience because we can only know God in the present.

There's another wonderful name for God in the ancient times—*the far, near One*. God is the 'far, near One'—that immense vastness beyond anything we know, and the deepest intimacy within each of us. *The far, near One*.

I was at the [Redwoods] Monastery a couple of weeks ago. I had two different conversations with two monks who I've known for 40 years. The one told me that recently she had to go into town in Garberville a couple of months ago and there she saw a friends of hers. The friend told her that Jerry was dying, and he was doing it poorly. *'He's agitated and mean and kicking people out. And it's just not Jerry. Everybody's talked to him and nothing's changed. You've got to call him. You've got to talk to him.'*

So, the monk called Jerry. She told me the first thing she did was scold him. *"What are you doing? You're dying here—this is important. Why are you messing it up? We've been friends since the '60s. You said you wanted the whole enchilada. You wanted the cosmic adventure of life and death, and to live into the glory of it all—and that's why you dropped acid all those years. So, get with the program! You've got to let go, let go of everything, everything. You've even got to let go of your despair!"* He died the next day.

The other monk has been diagnosed with cancer. She's of a great age, not taking any treatment, living into it. It's gone to her brain now—so it's compromising things. Another monk told me (I make an appointment every year to talk to my friend here) that prior to that conversation, she met my friend in the hallway (the one who has cancer). She said, *'I don't know his name. What's his name? I don't know his name. I can't remember his name.'* Three times she said, *"I don't know his name."* The monk said, *"His name doesn't matter. You know him. You know him."*

We had a wonderful conversation. She told me about the cancer. Then she said, ‘You know, my only prayer, my only prayer is “*God, keep me close.*” Whatever happens, however it happens, “*Keep me close*”.

It works for all of us, doesn’t it? In all of our days now—and in the completion of our days—*God keep me close*. We don’t have to be afraid of death, because we’ve already died with Christ in Baptism, in our baptism into his death.

Each one of us is going to die in our own way. There may be fear and agitation, and all sorts of things, all that stuff can go on, but we don’t need to be afraid of death because the Crucifixion has engaged this life and death and beyond. ‘*They stare at one another, each longing for the other to volunteer to do what needs to be done, but they’re not able to do it.*’

That’s the work of Christ, who has done it, who engaged his own life—and at the cost of his own life—built that bridge across the far away distances that we might know the fullness of life now, and into the beyond—seemingly far away, but not that great a distance.

The dead end has become a doorway. St. John in his vision today says, “*I saw a new heaven—I saw it—and a new earth.*” [Revelation 21: 1] (We don’t think much of visions in our times because we are so far away, far away, from the deep-down truth, and the wisdom and grace.)

The cosmos will not perish—the cosmos will experience total renewal—and we get to be a part of it. For now, everything is distorted—the way we see each other and the family and friends—it’s all distorted like seeing through a glass darkly. But, in the heavenly days we shall see each other for the first time in all the glory and splendor in which God sees us, and we’re going to fall down laughing at how beautiful each other is. It will be sheer delight! (And in heaven we’ll see people we didn’t expect to see there. We didn’t think they qualified.) And the laughter will go on and on because heaven will be a communion of love with all living beings.

And when we taste the meal here, we are tasting the fullness of the cosmos, and all the creatures and sentient beings. This is a foretaste of the feast to come—and we get to participate.

Life shall become real, and precious—and even more holy and sacred and alive into eternity—by that Love which moves us into endless and eternal creativity, and possibility, and joy.

For now, '*God, keep us close*'. Amen.

The peace which surpasses all human understanding, keep your heart and minds in Christ Jesus.