

**All Saints Sunday: Our Comfort, Our Hope**  
**November 7, 2021**  
**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Psalm 130**  
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They say that the first year after a death is the hardest. Which is true I guess, but I find that grief is a constant companion of life really. The grief may subside, may even seem to go to sleep at times, and yet it is often a regular guest in my life. Those times when I really wish I had my mom or dad here to seek advice from or when there is a special celebration like a wedding or graduation of course thoughts of them come up. Those are the expected times, but even in everyday life it can sneak up and surprise you, too. The passing thought, the quick memory, the momentary feeling of them passing by like a shadow of the past, it happens that fast.

When those aching thoughts arise and we become melancholy for a moment, perhaps even have a quick cry or tear and whisper “I wish you were still here.” Take heart because it is a sign that they live on in this life in some form. Author Anne Lamott says “You will lose someone you can’t live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn’t seal back up. And you come through it. It’s like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.”

It can be hard sometimes to look at the fingerprints they have left on our hearts. The infinite ways they have left their mark in our lives. The many ways those experiences have shaped us and the many ways those memories continue to shape and move us. It is not just remembering those many ways we will miss them, but our effort to fill the void now left behind, as if that is even possible. We are about the task of allowing those good and bad memories somehow transform us and make us better people.

When we think of grief, the first thought is tears and sadness, but the apostle Paul in his letter to the believers in Rome said these words, “We also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for us.”

God is not only acquainted with our grief and the many ways that we suffer in this life, God has walked with us and shown us that grief and suffering can sometimes have some positive outcomes. The prophet Isaiah says that the messiah would be a person acquainted with suffering, a man of sorrows. Christ, himself, wept bitterly for his loved ones at the tomb of Lazarus and for his people when he gazed upon Jerusalem as he entered it one last time before his own death. But those who believe in the Gospel, also know that his death was precious and life saving for the world. We often quote, the verse from John’s gospel, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” John 15:13. Even more so, Paul reminds us that Jesus died, not only for friends, but for sinners so that the world may be reconciled to God once again.

In our grief and loss, we may discover we are stronger than we could imagine. We discover the precious things that our loved one taught us through the years that gives us strength today. Growing up, I loved to look over my father’s shoulder when he was fixing a car or working in the basement at his well-stocked work bench. As a young child I didn’t realize how much knowledge I was gleaning from those weekend projects until my father was gone. To this day, my knowledge of tools, car parts and the basic functions of a car, have come in handy many a time in my life. Even more than that, his example helped me to have confidence and interest in such skills, love working with my hands to fix things and even create my own work area to enjoy. Still to this day, I prefer getting tools at Christmas and dream of doing real woodworking someday. Now for the

men in the crowd this may seem like second-hand knowledge that we all have, but for women, who tend to get pushed out of the garage or the tool shop, it is a special gift that fathers give us that we carry for life.

Sometimes even the opposite lessons of life are gleaned from the loss of someone dear to us. We vow to take better care of our health, so we don't die prematurely. Perhaps we change our lifestyle because we don't want to make the same mistakes they made. We may dedicate our energy to fighting the causes of their early death, such as cancer, drunk driving, or other tragic causes. One of the deep sorrows my brother's family experienced was the death of Blair, my niece Katie's best friend, who died of cancer when they were teenagers. Katie and her friends walked with Blair through those dark days. After Blair passed, her mother, with the support of others including Katie and her family, started a charity called Blair's Tree of Hope to provide support for families with kids in long-term Pediatric Cancer care at hospitals. This charity seeks ways they can free up the parents to be present for their children and ease the costs of being present for their child. Their motto is simple: Give Hope: Helping Other People Everyday. Starting such charities is one way to channel our grief that carries on the memory, legacy and impact that our loved one has in the world.

Unfortunately for some people, the death of a family member is more emotionally complicated. A fractured past, perhaps abuse or trauma, or even just a terrible falling out that never experienced reconciliation has made their death a hot mess of grief and regret. They may feel delivered from the painful realities of the difficult relationship while still grieving the loss of any opportunity to redeem the relationship. As a pastor my heart breaks and often seek ways to assist the person to find some measure of forgiveness and healing as part of their grieving.

Regardless of the type of sorrow we feel this Remembrance or All Saints Day, it is a time to name and remember those we grieve, to pray and comfort one another, to

share those stories that feel like a healing balm upon our hearts, as we honor their memories. Paul in his writings reminds us that our grief and sorrow comes with a silver lining. Through our faith in Jesus and in the power of resurrection we find hope that this grief is not the end, but a time of temporary absence and as we long for that day when the veil between this realm, and the heavenly realm will be pulled back. Some see such a day coming at the end of time, or on the day of our own death and still others experience it as moments of life we may call those thin places. We hear their words, feel their presence or even see their influence on our lives guiding or protecting us.

We are reminded of the high cost of duty and service for our country and for love. We are reminded of the struggles we all face in this world and the need for more love, more peace and more forgiveness. We are reminded of our challenge to continue the legacy of faith and service as we too work to leave this world a little better than we entered it.

In closing I would like to read a poem

*Epitaph - By Merrit Malloy*

*When I die  
Give what's left of me away  
To children  
And old men that wait to die.*

*And if you need to cry,  
Cry for your brother  
Walking the street beside you.  
And when you need me,  
Put your arms  
Around anyone  
And give them  
What you need to give to me.*

*I want to leave you something,  
Something better  
Than words*

*Or sounds.*

*Look for me  
In the people I've known  
Or loved,  
And if you cannot give me away,  
At least let me live on in your eyes  
And not your mind.*

*You can love me most  
By letting  
Hands touch hands,  
By letting bodies touch bodies,  
And by letting go  
Of children  
That need to be free.*

*Love doesn't die,  
People do.  
So, when all that's left of me  
Is love,  
Give me away.*