

Melinda _____ Matthew 5:1-12

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Someone (and I don't know who) has said: "Sorrow is the price that we must pay for love."

Such a word might be taken as a caution never to give oneself to love, but to preserve my precious self apart from the intimacies, entanglements, and commitments of love. Indeed, this may seem the ideal of a perfect life: self-possession, self-fulfillment, autonomy - and so, freedom from sorrow, attained by remaining untouched, unbound and unwounded by love.

Today we are touched, bound, and wounded by love known. Sorrow moves among us in thoughts and hearts suffused with love for one whose life brightened our own.

Her graces were those of one accustomed to giving of herself, notably, in a demanding discipline of care for others, that cries out to be dispensed with love. Her specialized knowledge of disease in the bodies of her patients, over long and difficult years of study and practice, deepened to wisdom of the human spirit suffering under severe trial.

Two years ago, Melinda spoke to us in this church about the ethical issues that she and her medical colleagues encountered as they treated a patient nearing death, acknowledging the dignity of the person in their care, making choices of treatment, or non-treatment, for a person who was precious to a family and friends who were losing someone they loved.

There is medicine for the soul as well as the body. Just a few weeks ago, she served us from the Holy Eucharist, here before this altar. Later, she asked for that sacrament of thanksgiving for Divine love, as her own life ebbed away.

I believe that her many friendships in this church were part of a much wider circle of persons whom she treasured. Many of you are here who can speak of her to others, although it can be hard to step out from under the cover of grief and to remember her aloud.

By speaking healing words together we create a "humanizing sense of time that is filled with the search for the meaning of a human life." [q. from Karl Weintraub]

And so, do tell of her life and her love as you have known it. It will provide healing speech, redeeming the hard hours and days to come. Do so for your own sake, and for those others who suffer her loss most keenly, and who need the solace of her love that still moves among us.

Dante spoke of the life and death of a good person as like the flight of an arrow; it is sent aloft from a trembling bow string, it whistles through the air, swiftly and with power, and at last it strikes home, its target. There its vibrations continue sounding for a time, before dying softly away.

We are living today with her vibrant and loving sound still touching our ears and hearts.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "I grasp the hands of those next me, and take my place to suffer and work, taught by an instinct, that so the dumb abyss may be vocal with speech."

The Beatitudes of Our Lord, recounted in St. Matthew's narrative, we take to be a charter of love, by which to live with the blessing of the Creator upon our lives. They give substance to the word *love*, slippery and bent as it is in its common currency. These sayings build a structure of understanding in our consciousness, to uphold us as we seek out the paths of love. Love has shape and form and meaning, fueled by deep feeling.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven."

That seems counter-intuitive. Are not the rich in spiritual knowledge those who live in God's favour? I mean those who famously speak of what God is doing *with* them, of what God is doing *for* them, and how *to understand* with sureness God's way in a suffering world, so that sorrow need unmoor no one who has faith?

Jesus says, it is those who are poor in spirit who live nearest the Father. The poor feel themselves in want, and are able to thankfully receive that for which they are most in need. God's love is endlessly poured out on human beings who know their want; who are numb from a bitter wound; who rage over the unfairness of death in the midst of life - those who are poor enough in spirit to be surprised by love. "It is all well with thee."

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth."

Oh yes! But when?

Does anyone own the earth? Or exercise ownership of any part of it that lasts beyond the span of a few years, or at most, a few mere generations?

Life comes to the earth, and is sustained in its goodness, by ways we cannot understand, nor repeat, nor frustrate by our senseless passion to rule what we take to be our own.

Persons meek enough to appreciate with all their being the gift of life itself, the "free lunch" that is the world for all of us - Blessed are they, for they have already, in some sense, inherited God's earth.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

A most timely assurance, But what would constitute comfort for those who sincerely mourn?

Knowing that nothing is ever lost that comes of God's love - no thing and no one. The One who gives life to our souls and bodies, the One who sustains us in life, moment by moment, does not give us up to death. He is yet the One in whom "we live and move and have our being." The One before whom "death hath no dominion." Were it otherwise there would be no god of being who is able to form and sustain us in being, and we would be alone in an accidental world - "lost out here in the stars".

And so this charter of the works of love goes on, marking those lives that show love within our world, intimations of the fullness of life that awaits us. They are:

- those who are merciful in the use of their gifts of love;
- those who are pure in heart, without pretension;
- the righteous, who are alive to an order of human being in the world worthy of God;
- the makers of peace, those marvelous humans who enhance the dignity of life for the persecuted and oppressed.

All of these are "the better angels of our nature." They live now in the presence of God.