

All Saints' Sunday

C.S. Lewis, the author of **The Chronicles of Narnia series**, was a man of faith and conviction. He wrote many other books on the Christian faith. Tragically, Lewis lost his wife, Joy Davidman, to cancer, three years after being married.

In a series of journals, Lewis processed his grief and his various emotions that accompany grief, including his own “anger and bewilderment” at God, his loss of faith, and “what life and his world was like without her, and his process of moving in and out of stages of grieving and remembering her.” Eventually his personal journals, became a book, titled: **“A Grief Observed.”**

In it, Lewis makes this observation: **“The death of a beloved is an amputation....”**

He goes on to say, **“For in grief nothing ‘stays put.’ One keeps on emerging from a phase, but it always recurs. Round and round. Everything repeats. Am I going in circles, or dare I hope I am on a spiral? But if a spiral, am I going up or down it? How often -- will it be for always? -- how often will the vast emptiness astonish me like a complete novelty and make me say, ‘I never realized my loss till this moment?’ The same leg is cut off time after time.”**

As his grief relates to his faith, he says: **“We were promised sufferings. They were part of the program. We were even told, ‘Blessed are they that mourn,’ and I accept it. I've got nothing that I hadn't bargained for. Of course it is different when the thing happens to oneself, not to others, and in reality, not imagination.”**

I think most of us can relate, each in our own way, to Lewis' observation on his grief. We all have experienced the death of a loved one or friend.

In the musical, **Les Misérables'**, the character, Marius, sings a song of grief, **“Empty Chairs at Empty Tables,”** over the death of friends and comrades in arms who have died in the student uprising against the French government. The first verse speaks to his grief observed: **“There's a grief that can't be spoken. There's a pain goes on and on. Empty chairs at empty tables. Now my friends are dead and gone....”**

Like the song from **Les Misérables'** - **“Empty Chairs at Empty Tables”** - we know of the empty pew places where our friends and loved ones always sat. It doesn't take much for us to remember them sitting there, their faces, their mannerisms, their voices, their very being.

In John Irving's book, **“A Prayer for Owen Meany”**, the young narrator, Johnny Wheelwrights mother dies a tragic, unexpected death. In

reflecting on his own grief over his mother's death, he observes his grief as he grows older, saying: **"When someone you love dies, and you're not expecting it, you don't lose her all at once; you lose her in pieces over a long time—the way the mail stops coming, and her scent fades from the pillows and even from the clothes in her closet and drawers. Gradually, you accumulate the parts of her that are gone. Just when the day comes—when there's a particular missing part that overwhelms you with the feeling that she's gone, forever—there comes another day, and another specifically missing part."**

We cling to our memories of loved ones, holding on to them as long as we can. But we know, as our lives go on, and while we never forget them, our memories of loved ones fade, little by little. It startles us, scares us, saddens us, bring tears to our eyes, not just for our grief over their death (some who died so many years ago, yet it still feels like yesterday), but that we know one day, we too will be just a memory, and in time, forgotten in the history of our families.

In his book, **"The Brief History of the Dead"**, Kevin Brockmeier: writes a story of a city, where the dead go after dying. It is not Heaven or Hell or even Purgatory. It is a city, like any city we have lived in. The "Dead" reside there, as long as the living remember them.

This city even has a newspaper. The Editor of the paper writes an op-ed piece. In it he says: **"I have always suspected that the thumping sound we hear is the pulse of those who are still alive. The living carry us inside them like pearls. We survive only so long as they remember us."**

When my own father died, someone shared a quote from Fredrick Buechner with me. I have been sharing it with others, including some of you, when a loved has died. Perhaps you will remember it? Buechner writes: "When you remember me, it means that you have carried something of who I am with you, that I have left some mark of who I am on who you are... It means that even after I die, you can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in your heart. For as long as you remember me, I am never entirely lost."

In one of the most powerful scenes in all of scripture, at least for me it is, the writer of John shares this very human, very vulnerable image of a grief observed by those gathered around Jesus: **"Jesus,"** John writes, **"began to weep."**

In those four words, we see the power and the vulnerability of God's love for us as shown in Christ.

At death, the death of loved ones, and in time, as we know, our own, God weeps.

And yet, God does not forget us. We will in time, all be forgotten, even if there is a name on a tombstone or plaque hanging on a wall, or even a footnote in a book. In time, the tears will dry and our memory will fade and no one living will remember us.

But God will.

"Jesus," the thief said on the cross, **"remember me, when you come into your kingdom."**

We all may at times, forget about God, in our happiness, our joy, in the good times of life. As one person said, perhaps Death is a reminder of God?

Let me share one final observation from Lewis' - "*A Grief Observed*" :
"...My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered from time to time. He shatters it Himself...Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of God's presence?.."

And so today, All Saints' Sunday, we pause to remember our loved ones, our own grief, and the love of the One who never forgets us - in life and in death.

Amen.