

Faure Requiem Eucharist for the Feast of All the Faithful Departed

Isaiah 25:6-9, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, John 5:24-27

Church of the Redeemer, Bethesda, Maryland November 5, 2017 David Schlafer

- 1) When we lose someone whom we deeply love, we walk with bare feet on a long path of grief. The trajectory of that journey isn't a series of straightforward steps from Point A to Point B. WHATEVER we are "in process" toward as we wend our way back and forth—

WHEREVER it is we might hope to arrive—the AIM, the DESTINATION, IS NOT CLOSURE.

- To turn a deadbolt that locks a door?
- To "come to terms" with interminable loss?
- To "get over it"—to move on, leaving love behind?

That is IMPOSSIBLE; and were it not, it would be UNCONSCIONABLE.

The burning sense of severed connection from those we love is preferable by far to COMFORT as COLD as CLOSURE.

Even in the case of conflicted relationships—relationships estranged or broken—we suffer keenly the loss of what we wish had been.

- 2) Grief in the loss of our closest connections takes, by turns, so many forms:

- Crashing waves whipped by gale force winds.
- Moving tides that ebb and flow.
- Intermittent showers, through which rainbows can appear—and then recede.

Over time our sense of grief can vary widely:

- From wound fresh and sharp.
- To pain that comes in pulsing throbs or surprising twinges.
- To scar tissue—forming and hardening.

So—No "one size fits all" message of condolence can ever assure us that the sender, (quote): *knows just how we feel.*

And nothing anyone can say or do will *make it all feel better.*

- 3) *Christ rose victorious over death—So, one day, shall they—And so, indeed, shall we.*

Asserted simply as such—the truth or proof of such claims aside—these affirmations of faith, however well intended,

can easily come across like sentimental verses on a sympathy card.

We note the words, feel—perhaps—a touch of relief, and then go on our grieving way.

Whatever resurrection hope may mean, it does not bring us closure.

- 4) Our losses are individual, but we convene this evening in community.

Not just sensing, but sharing both our gratitude in gifts we have received—and our grief in the departure of those who have given us themselves.

Each of us has a POINT of connection with others who have LOST connection.
Tonight we are offered neither well-argued assertions,
or well-intended assurances regarding resurrection.
We are instead enfolded in soaring, swirling trajectories of tonal color,
in phrases surging forward, then casting back—then pressing on yet again—
melody and harmony, continually replaying in theme and variation
the rising/falling feeling swings that are the cadences in the cycles of the heart.

- *Requiem aeternum—Lux perpetua*
Rest eternal grant them, Lord—Let light perpetual on them shine—Kyrie Elieson
- *Pie Jesu, dona eis requiem—Merciful Lord Jesus, grant them rest.*
- *O Lord Jesus Christ, King of Glory—Liberate departed souls.*
- *Sanctus, Sanctus—Hosanna in excelsis*
- *Lamb of God, grant them rest.*
- *Libera me, Domine—from death eternal set me free.*
- *Chorus angelorum—To eternal rest may angels welcome you.*

5) Hauntingly beautiful it may be—but is this music just an emotional end run
around the questions—bitter and hard—that the separation of death hurls in our faces?
NO, it most certainly is NOT.

To reduce the mystery of life and death, connection and separation,
to a spoken set of propositions, assurances, concepts, or arguments—
this would be not altogether unlike trying to claim that
we can accurately, fully convey the music of Faure's Requiem,
by just playing it in a single melody line on the piano with one hand.

NO—The depth of loss and separation that is induced by death,
and the prospect of eternal life and unending reconnection
that is promised us in Christ's resurrection—
neither of these can simply be uttered in sentences and paragraphs.

Each—in the depth of its anguish, and in the height of its hope—
must be fully orchestrated and sung forth in full voice.

6) In Faure's Requiem—music too rich for spoken words alone—
we are granted a deeper sense of the words from Scripture we have heard this evening.
They are texts of grief and gratitude—
of trust in the midst of despair—
of sure and certain hope in the face of data that would seem to be evidence for disbelief.

Each of them, a set of lyrics drawn from the music of our Faith Tradition.

- *The Lord of Hosts will make for all people a feast of fat things, sings Isaiah.
of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined.*
As Isaiah sings, he envisions a banquet—not of fussy, fancy food, but of comfort food:
*The Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces—
one tear at a time from one face at a time—
wiping and wiping—for as long as it takes to dry every tear from every face.*
- *Truly, truly, sings Jesus (in Gospel Composer John’s orchestration) the hour is coming—
AND NOW IS—When the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God—
and those who HEAR will LIVE.*

7) Granted, St. Paul is not the world smoothest songwriter.

(One sometimes wonders if he can even carry a tune.)

But tonight he is trying his best—and it is well worth hearing—listen:

The dead in Christ shall rise first.

Then we who are alive—we who are LEFT—

We shall be caught up TOGETHER WITH THEM in the clouds—to meet the LORD in the air.

And SO—WE shall ALWAYS BE—WITH the LORD.

CLOSURE? No way. Endless opening, rather.

CLOSURE? Absolutely NOT. Isaiah, Paul, and Jesus are all singing CONNECTION:

In the very midst of grief—real and deep.

In outpourings of gratitude—deeper and more real still.

All of us go down to the dust.

BUT even AT the grave, WE make OUR SONG:

ALLELUIA, ALLELUIA, ALLELUIA.