

November 6, 2022
All Saints' Sunday, Year C
The Rev. Keri T. Aubert
St. Thomas's Episcopal Church, New Haven, CT

Daniel 7:1-3,15-18
Psalm 149
Ephesians 1:11-23
Luke 6:20-31

Last Sunday night, I dreamed about my paternal grandmother. It was a surprise. I've never dreamed about her before. I don't even remember her. She died when I was seven, which is old enough to remember *something*, but when I think of her, I draw a complete blank. After the dream, I couldn't get back to sleep. Eventually I got up and journaled the details. Later in the morning, I texted my older sisters, asking what they remember of her. While they could say almost nothing about her, they quickly agreed on one thing: she was difficult to communicate with, because she spoke only French.

That really brought me up short. It had never occurred to me. But once they said it, it made sense. Let me be clear: my grandmother was not an immigrant; my father's people have lived in Louisiana for centuries. But they were speakers of what used to be called *Cajun French* and is now more properly called *Louisiana French*. My father's first language was French. He didn't really speak English until he started school. The use of French in school was absolutely forbidden, and the rules were enforced with punishment and shaming. As a result, and as intended, in about a generation, French was nearly eradicated from Louisiana.

I've long known this about my father. Though I never thought to ask, I've assumed that it was because of his treatment in school that he never used French with his children. But I had never thought about it enough to realize that, while my father was bilingual, his parents could not speak with his children. Eradicating the language in effect diminished the possibility of rich multigenerational relationships. It was about language, and it was about so much more.

I realize that this sort of loss occurred on a vast scale for people from indigenous communities. It's being experienced right now by people who have immigrated by choice or by displacement due to economics or conflict or climate change. I don't mean to equate my experiences with those. I do mean to invite us to think about the constellations of relationships to which we like all humans are connected. How are those relationships sustained? How are they broken? How do they get restored?

For some reason, lately into my mind have been popping questions that I wish I had asked my parents before they died. Simple questions like, "How old were you when you first had running water?" And this week, "What was your first year of school like?"

I can't tell you the last time I thought about my grandmother Marie Antoinette, but she's who came to visit on Sunday night. Actually, in the dream, I visited her. I seldom remember my dreams, but this one remains vivid, though it was short. As it opened, I was standing in my grandmother's kitchen. I don't remember what she or her kitchen looked like, but I knew that's where I was. I could see from there into her bedroom, where she was sitting up in bed.

I walked over, sat on the bed next to her, and said, "I'm sorry it took me so long to come and see you."

"That doesn't matter," she replied. "I'm so glad you're here."

“There are so many things I want to ask you,” I said. “I have so many questions.”

“Let’s have coffee while we talk,” she replied. “You can make it, and I’ll tell you how. Everyone used to say I made the best coffee.”

“Okay,” I said, and woke up.

Today we’re celebrating the Feast of All Saints. There are three feast days from October 31 to November 2: All Hallows’ Eve, All Saints’ Day, and All Souls’ Day. Of these, All Saints’ Day is the most important in the Church and is one of seven principal feasts in the Episcopal Church. We are allowed to transfer its observance to the following Sunday.

The history of these three days, and why there are three days, is a little complicated. All Hallows’ Eve of course has roots in the Celtic pagan celebration Samhain [SAA-win]. In Roman Catholic tradition, All Saints’ Day is for recognizing the more official saints and martyrs of the church, while All Souls’ Day is for recognizing the more common dearly departed, particularly family members and friends, particularly those who died within the previous year, and particularly to pray to help get them out of purgatory.

The Protestant Reformation got rid of purgatory and the veneration of saints and shifted All Saints’ to include, well, pretty much everyone. As *The 1979 Book of Common Prayer* tells us, “The communion of saints is the whole family of God, the living and the dead, those whom we love and those whom we hurt, bound together in Christ by sacrament, prayer, and praise.”¹ Because the celebration of All Souls’ remains popular in some cultures, The Episcopal Church began to recognize it with the *1979 Book of Common Prayer*.

Regardless of the particulars, this time of year, we allow our hearts to escape the bounds of time and place, and we allow our imaginations to fly with the possibilities that arise. The Communion of Saints includes the dead, the living, and the yet-to-come. Maybe All Saints’ is really about God’s unlimited reconciliation of all things—which is to say, the healing of all that was and is and yet will come. Maybe that promise gives us the dose of hope that we need to keep walking through difficult and uncertain times. We remember our connections with those past, present, and future, we see that God is making all things new, and we have faith that all will ultimately be subject to ultimate a holy peace. This gives us hope, which is both belief and action.

I’ve talked enough. As you know, Denise Terry led the creation of this lovely altar for our celebration today. I’d like her and the children to come up and tell us about it.

Notes

¹ *The 1979 Book of Common Prayer*, 862.