Celebration of the Life of Brice Douglas Prince

May 26, 2023

Words offered by the Rev. Ledlie I. Laughlin

Our Easter proclamation this morning is that by the glorious resurrection of our savior Jesus Christ the bonds of death are broken. Nothing can keep us from the love of God and dear Brice, while dead, is now gloriously risen, alive in God’s eternal embrace.

Death does not have the final word. So I will speak of it first. Death by suicide is hard for everyone. I believe it creates a particular challenge because try as we might, we cannot make sense of it. For most, it is beyond imagining. Our rational minds try to understand, try to put the pieces together, yet are thwarted. We struggle to find a sensible way to reconcile this outcome with the person we know, the life he lived, the love we shared. And if we’ve encountered suicide before, we remember it now because we could never quite put it to rest back then.

What then, do we do? I recommend three things. First, we create space to allow for the mystery of things beyond our comprehension. Give yourself and others that humbling grace of not knowing, not having answers. Second, we pray. Ask God to hold you gently, tenderly, with love, in the midst of mystery beyond our comprehension. And third, we love. Love one another. Love the people who are close, reach out in love to those who are far. Love, especially, those in need of some love today. These three: open space for grace, pray, and love.

Please do not speak of someone “committing” suicide; it is not an act of aggression. Please do not speak of someone “choosing” suicide; it is no more a choice than cancer is a choice. The agency here is with the illness; it is an illness that leads… that led, in this case, to death.

This is no one’s fault. Brice did not die because of something that any one person or any group of people did or did not do. Now, you may hear my words, even believe them to be true, yet still hold yourself to account, revisiting “what if?” If so, please return to my words, and be merciful; merciful with yourself, merciful with others. This is no one’s fault.

It may be that some here feel the need to forgive or to be forgiven. While forgiveness is an act we choose, we cannot force it; we may pray to be open – to forgive Brice, to forgive someone else, to forgive ourselves – to set them and ourselves free.

If you are struggling with illness or depression, please speak of your struggle with someone – with me, with a doctor, therapist, pastor or friend. You are not alone. We are here for you, for one another.

I have given death the first word, but death does not have the final word. Love has that honor.

So let us now speak of love. Let us now speak of Brice, this beautiful beloved child of God, the person that we know as husband, father, son, brother, uncle, cousin, friend. Let us celebrate Brice and give thanks for his life and love!

How could I not but say that Brice was a prince of a man? Better still, Brice was a good man. So many of you have shared stories – I borrow your words – and add my own – to speak of his quiet kindness, his thoughtful manner, his warm smile, gentle and caring, unpretentious. Also, his intelligence, intellectual curiosity; his being an absolutely voracious reader.

I won’t quote everyone, but this from Brice’s father, Doug: Brice’s “death will leave an empty place in the constellation of my life. That emptiness can be partially filled with my memories and the shared memories of others. I embrace the sadness that I experience now as a way to honor his life. Looking back at all the memories people have shared about Brice, there are certain adjectives common to many: intelligent, curious, serious reader, focused, kind, caring, nurturing, dedicated, a principled man with integrity and a sense of humor. I share these appreciations and would add self-introspection with a little shyness, which I totally understand and respect. However, his handwriting was almost impossible to read, but then Da Vinci also wrote in a code.” Doug concludes, “here is a Haiku by Maria Cezza that struck a chord with me.

*half moon--/*

*next to me/*

*your absence*

And from Patrick, “meticulous, thorough, never hurried. He seemed content to continue reading, researching, puzzling, cooking, baking, or whatever was drawing his attention at the time, despite the world around him. Brice would always go deep on the issue, whether it was the mundane, like digging through product reviews to find the best new kitchen gadget, or the profound – when he spent hours, days, weeks learning the science and technology behind the latest cancer research to explore new treatment options with Will’s oncologists. Brice’s diligence was certainly evident in the kitchen…” And here, I jump in to say that Michele brought samples and treats to share with St. Columba’s staff – delicious loaves of bread that might have jalapeno cheddar, walnut, olive. Yum.

Alex, I believe your father’s deepest desire, beyond all others, was to be for you a good and loving father. And for you Michele, his deepest desire was to be a good and loving husband. I pray for you both, for his sake and for yours, that despite the years cut short, you have stored up memories of his love that can sustain through your life.

Alex and Michele, in the face of your loss, which is for you yet another loss, I have no words to makes sense of it all; I daresay none of us do, try as we might. So I speak for us all as I speak for myself, when I say my heart is with you, my love and my care is with you. We will walk with you through the days and the weeks and the years to come. Through the dark shadows of those valleys and in the bright joy upon the hilltops; we will walk with you. Through the tears and weeping of night, and one day through the laughter, as joy comes in the morning, we will walk with you.

In the face of all that is unknown this day, one thing we do know – that God’s love is everlasting, that by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, we too are raised into eternal life with God and with one another. In my father’s house are many rooms, said Jesus to his disciples; his words of farewell. I am going ahead of you to prepare a place for you, that where I am, there you may be also. Love is the only house big enough to hold this pain.

A house with many rooms, a room for each and for all, a house where all are welcomed in and no one is turned away, ever. A house built with love, with holy love, God’s love, where all are safe; where there is no more striving or pain, no more illness or fear, no more loneliness or struggle; where God shall wipe away every tear. A home where we are awash in love, in God’s love, in the love of one another. A home, then, of joy, where all are embraced in the fulness of who they are as beloved of God.

It is into your care, most merciful loving God, that we commend the soul of our brother Brice, that he may now be one, in the company of our brother Will, in the company of all whom we love but see no more, of all the saints in light.

Said Jesus to his friends; you know the way: I am the way, the truth, and the life. My way is the way of love. Love one another, dear ones. This life is precious. So live today with love. Love those you already love. Love those you struggle to love. Love those who are near. Love those who are far. Love the best you can today. Then get up tomorrow and do it again, everyday: love is the way.

May God hold us all – with Brice – in eternal love. Amen.