

### I've Found A Friend

I've found a friend oh such a friend!  
He loved me ere I knew Him;  
He drew me with the cords of love,  
and thus He bound me to Him;  
And round my heart still closely twine those ties  
which nought can sever,  
For I am His, and He is mind, forever and forever.

I've found a friend; oh, such a friend!  
He bled, He died to save me;  
And not alone the gift of life,  
but His own self He gave me.  
Nought that I have my own I call,  
I hold it for the Giver;  
My heart, my strength, my life, my all, are His, and His forever.

I've found a friend; oh, such a friend!  
So kind and true and tender!  
So wise a counselor and guide,  
so mighty a defender!  
From Him who loves me now so well  
what power my soul can sever!  
Shall life or death or earth or hell? No: I am His forever.

### "Forever Friends"

Jesus said to Martha,  
"I am the resurrection and the life.  
Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,  
and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.  
Do you believe this?"

John 11:25-26



Linda Post, *Solstice*, detail

Wait in a line that wraps around the funeral home and you'll hear every blame word for relieving the pain of death that grieving souls have ever come up with. There's the one that faults the person who has died. This one slip's unnoticed into the spin about the person's life style: "He didn't take care of himself; she drank, he drugged." Sometimes it's others who get blamed: "The doctor misdiagnosed her; the driver was texting when he hit him." Other times we point fingers at the system: "Insurance wouldn't pay for the treatment she needed; he got the infection in the hospital." Often a terrible disease takes the wrap: "The cancer got him; it was her heart." Sometimes people blame God: "Why did God let my child die?"; "Why did God save me but not my husband from the attackers?"; "Why didn't God save all those innocents from the mudslide?"

In our gospel story it was Jesus who took the heat from Mary and Martha for their brother's death. They blamed him for not healing Lazarus when both they and Jesus knew that he could. Confused and angry they rejected the charge that his failure was related to their belief in resurrection and in him as God's Messiah. And because they were empty in the empathy department there was nothing Jesus could say to soothe their pain. So he stopped talking, went over to the tomb of his friend, and began weeping. 'The difference between sympathy and empathy is not immaterial', wrote Joan Chittister in her reflection on compassionate hearts. 'Sympathy enables us to feel. Empathy requires us to act.' (Art of Living, p. 62)

Lazarus died and Jesus wept, feeling the pain of it all. In her reflection on psalm 39:12:

"Teach me, O God, how fleeting my life is. Hear my prayer,  
listen to my cry; for I am your passing guest . . .  
like all who have gone before me."

. . . Mary Luti wrote in 'Passing Guest': 'Whenever I'm herded onto a jetliner with a couple hundred other uncomfortable, prickly travelers, or crammed into a subway full of bleary commuters, or crushed in any crowd where a crash or a derailment or a shooting or a stampede could suddenly kill us all, I find myself thinking, "These are the people I may die with today." I look intently at them, eavesdrop on their conversations, imagine their back stories. "You and I may die together today," I say to them in my inmost heart. Does that sound morbid? Maybe it is but it helps me be human. The more I see others as people I might die with, the harder it is to be rude and judgmental and impatient, my usual behavior in hordes. There's something pathos-inducing about this thought. It elicits a softening. We're not rivals for life's overhead bins. We're not jockeying for earth's limited seating. We're not first class people and steerage people. We're dying companions. How can I not be reverent? How can I not be kind? The psalmist knows he's here today, gone tomorrow, a passing guest of God. We all are. On earth for a fleeting breath, we live by sheer hospitality, God's to us, ours to each other, our common death our closet bond.

For everyone in the great crowd of mortals, age to age, it's the same. Soon I will die with you, and you with me. In the meanwhile, let's be kind.'

Lazarus died and Jesus wept. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" (John) Greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved into action he said: "Take away the stone! Come out! Unbind him!" 'Unbind him of those strips of cloth, the grave's apparel, the shroud that wraps him up in a leaden existence this side of physical death. Unbind him! Let him see the light of day and feel fresh air in his lungs' (UCC Sermon Seeds, April 2, 2017).

Since it's Lent, one way I like to enter into this story is to think about the 'strips of cloth' that bind me, my addictions and fears, and feelings of hopelessness and loss that keep me from dying to self and rising to new life in Christ.

Another way is to consider Jesus' words, Resurrection and Life. A suggestion about how to do that lies in the margins of my Spiritual Formation Bible. The author writes (p. 1323): 'Jesus is "the resurrection and the life." Is your perception of the future determined by the certainty of your death or by your faith in Jesus? Is your life determined by the ability to make life "happen" or by the power of Jesus' presence within you to give you life? Find a quiet place and a quiet moment. Quiet your body and slowly breathe the life of Jesus' presence in. Hold your breath and let your mind and heart say, "Jesus, my life!" Slowly breathe "death" out. Hold your breath and let your mind and heart say, "Jesus, my resurrection!" Repeat these phrases a few times. Let Jesus speak of resurrection and life to you.'

My favorite way, however, is to sing with Cora Kenny her best loved gospel tune.