

Trinity Church in the City of Boston

The Rev. Morgan S. Allen

August 10, 2022

Jack Murphy

Come Holy Spirit, and enkindle in the hearts of your faithful, the fire of your Love. *Amen.*

Good morning.

On behalf of the Murphy family and the Trinity Church parish family, I welcome you to this celebration of life: of Jack's good life lived among you, and of his life eternal now underway in the nearer company of his God.

We gather this morning, not in platitude or in empty promise, but in "the sure and certain hope of the resurrection"ⁱ ... *the sure and certain hope of the resurrection.* Even so, the grief for one as young and vital as Jack is heavy, and there is no need to round your sadness's corners or dull its edges – no need to temper your anger, your indignation, or your hurt. Now is the time, this is the place, and these are the forbearing companions with whom to acknowledge and share that weight. See, Jack did not earn his mortal end and his family does not deserve this anguish, for Jack Murphy's death was not God's plan, and there is no judgment in it.

Here that again:

*Jack did not earn his mortal end and his family does not deserve this grief,
for Jack's death was not God's plan and there is no judgment in it.*

Two days after lightning struck Jack's National Outdoor Leadership Schools' campsite, four others – unrelated, all the way across the country, and ranging in age from 29 to 76 – also died by lightning strike. Though we tend to sensationalize the seemingly impossible many variables that intersected with such terrible consequence for Jack and the Murphys, the caprice of those circumstances is no more than the constellations of time and place when two cars meet in a fatal crash, or even in the advance of a disease, which begins with one cancerous cell – *one* – taking purchase in an unsuspecting, undeserving host, and becoming ten malevolent cells ... until that mass becomes too many.

And there is no personal judgment in any of this ... God pulled no lever, moved no piece, sent no storm. Rather, Jack's death testifies to the frailty and the vulnerability we share: all of us are this fragile, and all of us remain – *always* – at infinite risk: sudden and slow, known and unknown, seen and unseen. That vulnerability is an essential element in God's gift of life to us.

Even so, we search for footing this morning, faithfully wrestling fundamental questions: How could this happen? How do we make sense of such an untimely, unimaginable death, and, as we profess faith in a loving God, how could such a sorrow be allowed?

The *only* true answer to any “How?” is that we live in a world of physics and biology, weather systems and electrostatic charges, where God has granted us unencumbered freedom, including freedom from God’s intervening protection. If God *could* have saved Jack, God *would* have saved Jack. For God’s will is *always* joy, *always* love, *always* life, and the God who created this beloved son, admired brother, treasured friend, would not, could not, and did not choose for him to die.

God did not need another hiker in heaven.

God did not take Jack to prove a point or to teach us survivors a lesson.

Jack’s life was and remains precious to God, and God would never plan Jack’s death for some higher purpose – *No!* –there are no higher purposes than life and love ... and I dare you to find one more loved than Jack Murphy.

In refusing to shortcut our grief with either greeting-card theology or unthinkingly attributing responsibility to God, we do not imply that Jack’s death was meaningless – *of course not*. Rather, we gather in this sacred space and with these old words to labor for meaning – the meaning of his life and all of ours – not by what has been done, but by what we will do now.

And as we take our first steps together after his death, we take heart that what was true nine days ago remains true today: we do not worship a God of wrath or caprice, but a God of welcome and constancy, the God of Christ who claims Love as the most powerful force in the universe. Therefore, the first thing we do is to remember our love for this young man, a boy, a babe still, as strong as he would grow to become. As his family so beautifully modelled for us, we tell stories of him, not in hushed tones, but with fond hearts, and not just today, but for as long as we have hearts that can feel and lips that can tell.

And we draw strength from the reassurance that the Creator of heaven and earth, who set the stars in motion and the planets on their courses, who stretched the heights of the mountains and the expanse of the seas, and accomplished all this *with nothing other than the power of Love*. Our God wrought into the cosmos’ finest, most mysterious elements a hope for that Divine Love’s fulfillment, a dream for all people to love their God, to know love, and to love one another. And though the Holy One who dared entrust us with the freedom to *choose* this Love will not touch any Divine finger to make it so, when we labor in faith, we never labor alone.

For the Holy One who created Jack and all that is, has loved him from the beginning of time and will love him *forever*. And our God, who wept at the death of his friend; who knew both the incredible joy *and* the great suffering of this passing life; *that* God remains with us *always*.

As the apostle Paul writes, “For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”ⁱⁱ People of God, *nothing* will separate us from the love of God – **not even this!**

So, if there is to be Grace for us in these hard days, then let that Grace be our renewed, awakened appreciation for the preciousness of every moment, every breath, every relationship with which God has blessed us, so that we may live lives worthy of the gifts we have received – including the twenty-two years of Jack Murphy’s good life.

Let us pray:

We seem to give Jack back to you, dear God, who gave him to us. Yet, as you did not lose him in giving, so we have not lost him by his return. Not as the world gives, do you give, o Lover of souls! What you give, you do not take away. For what is yours, is ours always, if we are yours. And life is eternal; and love is immortal; and death is only a horizon; and a horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight. Lift us up, O God, that we may see further; cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly; draw us closer to you, that we may know ourselves nearer to our beloved who are with you. And while your Son prepares a place for us, make us ready for that happy home, that, where they are and you are, we too may be; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

ⁱ From “The Committal, Rite II” in the *Book of Common Prayer*, p. 501.

ⁱⁱ Romans 8:38-39.