

The Rev. Wayne Nicholson
St. John's Episcopal Church
6th March 2017
Timothy Brockman Requiem at St. John's

[This is the sermon offered at St. John's Monday morning, at the Requiem for Tim's family and friends.]

Every time I see the first star of the night my heart soars, just sort of skips a beat, and I say, "Hi, Shirley." Shirley was my mom. She died before smart phones, and email, and texting. But she's texting me.

Tim texted you a lot. Some of you first thing in the morning.

He won't stop. The cosmos included this technology in the creation of the world some four and a half billion years ago.

The text message won't come through your phone, but through your heart. It will be a message of love, of reassurance, of comfort. But most of all... of love.

This is hard work, this death. Hard because it is so unexpected; he was so young. We move between denial and deep grief and anger and acceptance, and often back through them all over again in no particular order and we wonder, "When will it *stop?!?*". Thursday afternoon as I was writing e-mails and sending this tragic news to the parish I thought, "Did this really happen? Is it just a bad dream? Should I double-check before sending this e-mail?"

But, of course, it really did happen.

The emotions of grief will not stop. They will just become easier. Not easy, but *easier*. Healing will happen. And it may take forever, no matter how many times people say "Time heals all wounds." But tears will come less frequently. We'll start doing things we used to do. We'll start laughing again. Our joys will be tinged with something we can't quite define – and that something will often be a thought of Tim. Or a cosmic text message.

Tim left this earthly realm on Ash Wednesday night. That morning I was brought up short by the imposition of ashes on my forehead, with the words, "Remember you are dust, and to dust you shall return." I take the ashes because they remind me of my mortality. Tim's death that night brought me up short again: the sharp, stabbing reminder that I truly *am* mortal, that we *all* are mortal. Even the ones we love the most.

And that's part of the heartbreak, isn't it. That we love so deeply. Somewhere in the back of our minds we *know* there will be grief. We just tend to put it off, put it out of our minds as much as possible. Only a week ago Tim and Elizabeth met with a financial planner to talk about their retirement – they wanted to spend their "elder" (and I say that gently, Liz) years together enjoying one another.

Instead, Liz sat with Tim for hours after his death. We anointed him: His face with the sign of the cross to indicate his faith; his lips which spoke words of love; his hands which fed the poor. It was an ancient and holy time.

Why Tim, why now? Honestly... I don't know. I refuse to believe that God decided it was Tim's time and so snatched him up from us. That would be a capricious God, and I don't think God is like that. No, I suspect that Tim's body just couldn't keep going... and so, he passed beyond us into eternity.

And now it's time to say good-bye. It's hard for those who are left behind. Very hard. It's like one long Good Friday. Loss and grief and darkness.

But we know that there is Easter. We know that Tim has entered the heavenly banquet, where he'll watch some sort of angelic football, eat heavenly food, maybe drink a celestial beer. I don't know what heaven is like, but I do know that there is no pain, no fear. No sorrow. No laments, no grief, no sadness. I know – I just know, in my heart, that there is a place of great joy, where the God of all creation has welcomed Tim, even as God weeps with us.

And so we sing the paradox of death: Good-bye, faithful friend, loving son, husband, brother, father, father-in-law, grandfather, uncle. May your soul rest in the love of all eternity: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.