

One of the things that I love so much about my grandma is that she is entirely technology adverse. It's not that she doesn't like it, she doesn't have any sort of aggressive feelings about it, but she just doesn't see the point. Now, of course, this has caused a smidgen of angst amongst all of us because this means my grandma doesn't have a cell phone, which means if she falls when she's out taking care of her garden or walking the dog, she has no means of contacting anyone. It means she doesn't have a computer, even though we think she would adore the world of the internet and all it would have to offer. This woman could watch John Wayne movies until she's blue in the face, but right now she needs them on VHS, *maybe* DVD, but there is no such thing as a streaming option. She reads more than any human being I know, myself included, and so Amazon would be a godsend to her, but alas that is not a thing in her world, so every few months, I send her a big load of new books that I know she'll blow through quicker than I can even imagine. She is old school to the nth power and that goes especially for my grandma and her relationship with letter writing.

Letter writing is my grandma's thing, it always has been. When I was in college, without fail every few weeks there would be a letter in the mail, scrawled across five or six sheets of rectangular notebook paper. She still does this, her and Kristin currently have a bi-monthly back and forth going

on that my grandma adores. I have on multiple occasions attempted to get into that kind of swing and rhythm with her, and I do it for a couple of months and then fall off the bandwagon, but it never stops her letters from coming. It used to be updates on what movies she had gone to see, what was going on in town, and now, at 97 she doesn't have as much to report, which she will tell you right off the bat, and then continue on for six pages. News about the weather, news about her puppy, Sassy, checking in on Scully, news about her latest visit with my mom, news about the three of us that my mom has told her on that most recent visit. It's comforting and I usually end up reading them out loud to fully appreciate them. Of all of the technology that I think my grandma would like, email is not one of them because a typed out message isn't personal. She doesn't care that her handwriting isn't what it used to be, she is going to keep writing those letters, because there is an intimate connection in them. Truthfully, in her letters is when my grandma will tell us she loves us, not one to say it out loud, but she will write it down, and let me tell you, because of that, I have saved every single one she has ever written to me.

It's this same kind of intimate relationship, this personal connection that runs throughout all of our lessons this morning, each one coming with an intense reminder that God is not in the business of long-distance,

unpersonal emails, but in the business of handwritten, deeply personal letters that let us know that we are not just one of seven billion other humans on earth, but we are a precious, beloved child of God, known fully to God as we are, with all of our foibles, failings, and miraculous tendencies.

It starts in Isaiah with a message to God's people experiencing pain, oppression, and heartbreak, and Isaiah tells us right off the bat that this isn't a message for a select group of people, but that God is about to do a new thing for *all peoples*. What follows is a description of a party unlike any other, one flowing with the finest wine and the richest of foods, where no one will go away hungry. There are promises given of enemies being defeated and the death shroud that feels as though it hangs over God's people being destroyed. Everything is being made new and before this meal starts, God promises that God will wipe away the tears from all faces, their disgrace will be no more, the people have been waiting for God's salvation and God has shown up. This is personal, one on one language. God isn't sending divine messengers to wipe away these tears, but God Godself is doing it. Wiping away what once was from each and every person.

This same message extends all the way to the end of all things, when God promises a new heaven and a new earth, when all that once was will pass away and the world will become new. God declares that here, amongst

God's people is God's home and that is where God will dwell, shoulder to shoulder, footsteps in sync, together, connected. This is not a far away God, but one who wants to live amongst God's people, being with them, a light in the darkness. And the message of Isaiah gets doubled down, death, mourning, crying, pain, they will be no more, and they will be no more because *God* will wipe those things away, once again, God is the parent who wipes the tears from cheeks and says, you're going to be ok.

And if all of this wasn't enough to emphasize God's personal and intimate connection with humanity, we have the gospel; Jesus literally weeping tears of sorrow at the death of a beloved friend and companion. This isn't Jesus standing off in the distance and observing a tragedy, this is Jesus *feeling* and experiencing it himself. Jesus feels the pain of loss, of grief, he sees others grieving and it just reiterates the pain he feels. God made flesh loved his friends and felt all the slings and arrows we feel within our own human relationships.

You cannot read these lessons without a profound realization that our God is a God who is as close to us a friend, a parent, a beloved and trusted companion. God is invested in *you*, God is connected to *you*, God has a stake in *your* relationship. Whatever you are feeling today as we honor and celebrate our beloved saints is something that God understands and holds

you in the midst of, because God feels that same carousel of emotions with you. God knows what it is to mourn and God knows how it feels to wipe the tears from your cheeks and say you're going to be ok. God is as close to you as God is to our beloveds that we remember today. God desires that kind of in depth, profound relationship with you, and sometimes we get caught in the cycle of feeling like God is just some far away, far-flung being who we only talk to when we need something. Sometimes we forget that God loves us on our easiest, chilliest, most boring of days and on our hardest ones.

So, to live into the message of these lessons this morning, we're going to take a page from my grandma's book. You were given a piece of paper when you came in today. We're going to take the next few minutes and write God a letter. Not a prayer, a letter. Whatever is on your hearts, whatever is weighing on you, even if it's God I'm really stressed out because I have to go to the store after church. Write God the banal and the profound, write God the intimate and the boring, write to your God who will take all of those feelings and say, beloved child I know. We're going to take, three, four minutes to get the conversation started. *Go...*

You probably aren't done, but take this home and finish it or just keep adding to it, keep the conversation going, keep that letter close as a reminder that this is who God is to us and our loved ones, someone as close as words

written on a page, someone as close as a grandmother who refuses to use

email, someone as close as the person we trust most to wipe our tears.

Beloveds, God loves you...God loves our saints...God is right here,

dwelling amongst us, because here is God's home...you are safe here...may

you rest in comfort knowing God is here...with us...and with those we love.

AMEN!!!