

Tramping Down Death By Death

The Reverend Shirley Smith Graham

Thanksgiving for the life of Mical Harvey

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We've spoken of the physical presence of Mical, yet this very service testifies to the fact of his bodily absence. Coping with the absence of those we love passionately is a skill that comes to us out of our long Judeo-Christian tradition. And, in fact, in the immediate years after the bodily death of Jesus and his resurrection and ascension, the believers had to face an emptiness; they had to figure out what to do in the absence of the *physical* presence of Jesus.

They found their way over time. They realized that the way to continue to live in the presence of Christ was to serve one another; to serve one another as if they were serving the living Christ. And we see this practice well-established among them: even as preachers shared the good news of the Gospel with folks, yet others shared bread and food with people. We ourselves, in a few minutes, will be included as those who are fed from that same Table of the first century believers; we will come to this Table, and we will find Jesus present. Although Jesus won't be present in body, He will be present in those who are feeding us and in those who are being fed. So we know how to find Jesus present where there is no physical presence of his body.

Having said that, we are in a peculiar, unimaginable and terrible position this morning. Any of us here, but especially those who loved Mical closest and best, are in a position we would not wish on anyone. His death puts proof to the saying that deaths often seem shocking and out of order. For those who love Mical, for those who shaped your lives around Mical and whose lives were shaped by Mical, you are hard-wired to have him in your lives. Yet when we turn toward where we expect him to be today, we find ... an empty space. Many kinds of suffering

result when a person takes his own life. And one of the sufferings that happens happens for the survivors. Your loved one has removed himself from your presence; that was a decision he made; but that was not *your* decision; you didn't get a say in the matter; but it is you who have to live with the results. I don't have easy answers today about how to live with the absence of Mical, but I do want to offer a reflection.

I do not know what took Mical to the point of his death; I do not need to know. However, I do feel sure that Mical had a brokenness, a brokenness that was perhaps more visible than the brokenness that all of us have inside ourselves, by virtue of being human. For many of us, we keep this brokenness well-tended and defended inside ourselves; we may put our brokenness in a box so that we can be functional most of the time and get on with the business of our lives.

For others of us, we wear our brokenness, almost like another article of clothing; it may be pretty comfortable to us most of the time, though sometimes it gets a little tight, or a seam rubs us the wrong way, or it begins to unravel. We are almost always aware of our vulnerability, but we try to manage our brokenness so that it does not hurt others.

For yet others of us, we never quite figure out what to do with our brokenness. It may be that we feel like the 20th century poet Victor Turner, who said, "I'm at odds with things"; what a great truth for us and our relationships: "I'm at odds with things" The poet goes further though. He says, "I'm at odds with things, but if things were even, / How could we be the beings we are? How could we come alive into heaven / Impress our flesh with that farthest star?" In other words, if we were not the odd beings we are, we wouldn't be the beings we are.

And that's just it. We *are* the beings we *are*. Life is gift. We simply *are*, who we are. Like Mical, we are the broken beings, the ones who make mistakes, the ones who do great deeds of generosity and righteousness, the ones who feel deeply, the ones who aren't always sure what to do with our anger or our pain. And what was true for Mical is really true for all of us: our

complete healing comes only after our bodily death, in that moment when God runs to meet us just as the father ran across the field to meet his prodigal son. God is the father who cannot, does not, wait patiently for us but rather runs in his own passion and haste to meet us before our journey's end.

Mical is healed; Mical is in the presence of the living God. In the words of the ancient anthem: Christ, being raised from the dead, Christ himself has tramped down death by death, giving life to those in the tomb. Knowing Mical is raised with Christ, may you also find life, even in the shadow of the tomb, even as you adjust to a life without Mical's earthly presence. May God bless you with remembering the gifts of who he is; may God salve your wounds; and bring you into a future of shalom. Amen.