

“Lift up your heads; and be lifted up!
That the King of Glory may come in.” AMEN!

Mr. Holland, the character in the movie
“Mr. Holland’s Opus” was played
by actor Richard Dreyfus.

Early in the movie Holland found himself
down on his luck
as a music composer.

He couldn’t make a living doing
what he loved to do, which
was compose and conduct symphonies,
so he fell back to his teaching degree
in order to pay the bills.

“It’ll just be temporary,” he told himself.

“I’ll teach and then in my free time,
I’ll compose music since teachers only
work a few hours a day.”

HA!

Mr. Holland quickly found out
that teaching is a full time and
a quite rigorous and demanding occupation.

His first day on the job was a disaster.

His first 1/2 year followed that
same sense of chaos, as he tried
to teach music through a textbook.

But, Mr. Holland paid attention to his students
and learned their interests and then
he built his curriculum around those interests.

Teach according to where the students are.

He found them loving
rock and roll and modern music.

That was the door to how Mr. Holland
connected his students to the classics.

And they responded with energetic passion.

Before he knows it, the short plan to teach
becomes a long career for Mr. Holland until
the school budget begins to call the shots.

Music and arts were on the chopping block.

“We don’t have the money to fund it,”
the school board said.

Mr. Holland's work in teaching music was cut
and amidst the turmoil,
he begins to look back on his life.

He recalls that his dream to
compose music never came to fruition.

He has the overwhelming feeling of
wasted years teaching in a school system
that was so quick to fire him.

He was overwhelmed by a sense
that his life was wasted.

Instead of writing music,
he let himself fall in love with teaching
and the profession let him down and
killed his spirit.

On his last day, the scene shows him taking
one last look at his music room.

With a box of things from his desk
he wanders the empty halls of the school
to find his car.

That's when he hears distant music.

He makes his way to the auditorium
to investigate.

When he opened the door
the crowd inside erupted with cheering.

As the camera moved through the crowd,
we recognize some of the people from the story,
that are now grown.

We recognize the “hard cases.”

The children who came to school
with problems from home or the street.

They’re there because Mr. Holland was
a trusted adult that made
time to talk and listen to them.

Many recognized how he’d been a key
that helped unlock their potential.

Most of all, we see Mr. Holland come
to understand that his life was not wasted.

No one’s life is a waste,
even when we feel our career
is not our calling,
our lives are not wasted.

And as this realization floods into Mr. Holland,
we can't help but cry. (Pause)

Today is that day we set aside
as a community of faith, to allow ourselves
to cry with one another.

Today is that day we set aside
to remember our community, and say
the names of those who have died
the past year and

light candles in their honor and
in memory of others.

Today is an opportunity to attend
to our grief in a ritual of remembrance.

The traditional hymns, the candles,
the tears are like what happens at a funeral.

There's really no need for a long sermon
when everything else is so powerful.

Yet, that question keeps coming up, doesn't it?

Where has the time gone?
When will the pain cease?

Why do I keep crying?
When can I let go of the regret? (Pause)

The gospel reading from John is
a snapshot of a larger story that began
with Jesus not going to Lazarus
immediately after receiving

the message that his friend was ill.

A lot of space, from that moment
until Lazarus is raised,

is allowed in the narrative
for grief and loss
to be experienced.

There's something to be said about that truth.

That we too need to make space to stand, sit, and cry.

To not try to explain the emotion,
certainly not platitute it,
but to only know that it's completely
natural and human to feel the
way we do after
someone we love dies.

Perhaps that is why we are

told that Jesus weeps.

Even though he knows that a resurrection is coming,
he knows that he cannot take death
away permanently for Lazarus,
nor can it be taken away from
his other friends, Mary and Martha.

He cannot take death away for himself.

Death cannot be taken away from any of us,
on this side of the kingdom,

yet in the midst of death, this accounts reminds us,
we are not alone.

Jesus is here.

We are here.

And if there's one thing we know
about love it is this... love lives.

Some of those who were in
the crowd of confusion that day around Jesus
said to one another, "See how he loved him!"

That's what being here and that's what
participating in All Saints (even from afar)

reveals to me.

It reveals how much we love.

This lesson needs to be taught.

With so much noise in the air,
with an election and so much insecurity
about who the next president will be...

With arrogant and boastful people
(especially in leadership) bragging about
being able to do wrongful things and
get away with it...

with people demonizing others for differing beliefs...

the choice we face is love or death.

Not just any kind of love,
but the kind of love
exemplified in Jesus. (Pause)

Love is more than a concept or even a feeling.

Love is an action word not a person,
place or thing word.

Love is that act of willingly giving ourselves

over to nurturing one's own or
another's spiritual growth.

So we gather today amidst the traditions,
the familiar hymns, and open the scriptures
to learn about life-giving,
life saving practices.

We gather to give ourselves over
to something or someone greater
than ourselves because if we don't
life grows cold and our love grows stingy.

(Pause)

So, listen again... "See how much he loved him."

"See how much God loves you!

True spirituality always directs love
outward toward somebody else.

AMEN!