

Memorial Service for Troy Lee Eggers (19-2020)

Trinity Episcopal Church

February 1, 2020

The Rev. Devon Anderson

Let us pray:

We thank you, gracious God,

for the life of Troy

a good and honorable man,

for the lives he touched

the hearts he gladdened

the burdens he lightened.

Amen.

This is the worst possible day imaginable. It is the worst day. And although it might seem like a strange or unfeeling thing to say, the truth is that it is also the best day. Today we come together to both mourn and celebrate the life of Troy Lee Eggers. Today is a paradox. Today is a day when two opposite things are both true at the same time. Today is the worst day. And today is the best day.

I don't need to tell you why today is the worst day. We all know. Today we feel the incredible injustice of a life cut short. It is the ending of Troy's physical presence among us, and the denial of what we imagine was his chance to live into the fullest possibility of his life and relationships. Today is the worst day because of what it will mean for the future, what it will mean to live the balance of our lives without Troy. For Lynn, Jackson, and

McKenna, for Todd, Ruth, and Larry, and for Troy's closest friends, today is the worst day because it marks, for them, the first leg of the long road of grief and loss, emptiness and despair. A road, we know, that never really ends, that doesn't ever arrive at a destination, but, thankfully, whose terrain changes over time, becomes more temperate, less fraught, gentler and more hopeful. Grief is unpredictable, wild, and undomesticated in form and intensity. It breaks like a storm for a long time, and then calms, even by an almost undetectable amount, seemingly without reason.

Today is the worst day because we're human, and we understand not the fullness and mystery of God. Today may be the day that we wonder most intensely why God has allowed this terrible thing to happen to this wonderful person. We are all vulnerable on worst days to wonder just where God is, and why God seems to fall silent when we need God the most. Sometimes worst days are the days during which we give ourselves permission to rail at God, to clench our fists and wail at the sky. Don't worry. God can take it. People of faith have been doing it for a very, long time. I don't know if you've noticed, but half of our psalms consist of people railing at God – *Why did you do this? Why did you forsake me? Everything is crumbling – where are you? Do you not care for us at all? What about all of those promises you've made to your faithful people?*

Fortunately, we are followers of Jesus. We are Christians. And Jesus not only taught us, but showed us, that God never abandons us. Even *Jesus* railed at God, on the cross and in the most excruciating pain a human can

suffer: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” he cried. But God showed us, through Jesus, that God is a loving God. God saves, delivers, restores, resurrects, and renews humanity, each one of us, without distinction or favoritism. Our God is not a punishing God or an exacting God. Our God created a human race with memory, reason, and skill. God created us to make choices between good and evil. Our God is not a grand puppeteer pulling the strings of our lives and deciding who will live into old age and who will die in the prime of life. It’s been said that “human beings are God’s language.” God shows opposition to cancer and birth defects and dying before our time not by preventing them or making them happen only to “bad” people (our God can’t do that), but by summoning forth friends and neighbors to ease the burden and to fill the emptiness. People that take care of us for the long haul, in our most desperate moments, are God’s language, the embodiment, voice, and presence of God in our midst. Not one that abandons but one that surrounds. Not vengeful but forgiving. Not absent but compassionate, living water filling in the smallest cracks of our deepest need. That’s God – moving people here on earth to help people in need. God may not be able to prevent devastation and heartbreak, but God uses God’s language to give us strength and perseverance to survive it. It’s God who helps us beyond the limits of our own strength. It’s God who welcomes Troy into loving arms, through the gates of heaven.

Today is the worst day. And we don’t do ourselves any favors by trying to hide or talk around it or offer platitudes. On worst days like today, only the truth will do. What is also true, at the same time, is that today is the best day. Because today we celebrate Troy – we tell our stories, and laugh, and

to tell each other what he meant to us, how he changed our lives, what we learned from him, how he enriched us and made us better people. And in these stories, we have this rare chance, this incredible gift to discover and name together all the meaning and purpose of Troy's life.

My own "best story" about Troy I shared with McKenna and Lynn at their home on the day he died. It was a two years ago, and I was on a five-month sabbatical from my ministry here at Trinity Church. As part of that time away, I signed up to do several endurance sports events – triathlons, open-water swim races, and the RAGRAI – that annual, seven day bike ride across the great state of Iowa. One of my best clergy colleagues and dearest friends agreed to come along with me, but he had not trained, and we began every morning biking together until we hit the first big hill, and then he would fall back, and I would largely bike the rest of the day alone, surrounded by tens of thousands of strangers. I didn't mind – Iowa is so beautiful with its gorgeous grain fields, and persistent wind, monarch butterflies, volunteer fire departments, and bright red barns. Still, from time to time I felt a little lonely. On the third day, while I sat under a tree drinking a food truck smoothy, my cell phone buzzed and there was a text that read, simply, "How's your butt?" "What??" I texted back, thinking it must be a wrong number. "How's your butt?" the text came back. "Uh...who is this?" I texted. "It's Troy! How's your butt?" What ensued was an extended conversation about our butts, and saddle soreness, aches and pains from riding hundreds of miles, and what funny things we had each seen along the road that day. That week was one of the most restorative weeks of my life in no small part because I had a friend who I never actually saw in person,

because we were never in the same place at the same time, but someone who was experiencing what I was experiencing, who was witnessing what I was witnessing and who wanted to connect about it, and also, most importantly, shepherd me, make sure I was okay. In that moment I experienced who Troy was for his family and so many other people in his life. He was the sheep dog, the herder, a human example of the good shepherd, the logistics guy – taking care of the pack, his people, checking in, connecting, caring for them. The kind of guy who really did want to know the answer to the question “how is your butt?”

Today is the best day, too, because it offers us the gift of a reminder about what is truly and most important. In a brief interchange with Jackson this past week, he told me the he knew his Dad would want all of us to take his death as a reminder of how truly precious life is and to make the most of it, not take it for granted. I think that is so incredibly wise. There is blessing in broken-heartedness. “Let us agree,” writes poet Jan Richardson, “that we will not say the breaking makes us stronger or that it is better to have this pain than to have done without this love. Let us promise we will not tell ourselves time will heal the wound, when every day our waking opens it anew. Perhaps for now, it can be enough to simply marvel at the mystery of how a heart so broken can go on beating, as if it were made for precisely this – as if it knows the only cure for love is more of it, as if it sees the heart’s sole remedy for breaking is to love still, as if it trusts that its own persistent pulse is the rhythm of a blessing we cannot begin to fathom but will save us nonetheless.”

It's like in the 1980s movie Harold and Maude when Maude is dying, and Harold is beside himself watching the first person he ever truly loved slip away. "But Maude," he cries, "you can't die. I love you." Taking his hands in hers she says, "That's wonderful, Harold! Go out and love some more." Today is a good day, because we are reminded of the love that Troy gave us and showed us – and instead of shutting us down, this day propels us to love more and love often and love well, like Troy loved us more and often and well. There is no remedy for love but to love more. And Troy's life and the suffering of Troy's death teaches us anew that the carrying of his memory into the future only happens if we embody in our own lives what was so remarkable and life-giving in Troy's.

Today is the best day, if only because it is proof that you – Lynn, Jackson, and McKenna - *you are not alone*. We are here: your co-workers, school friends, volleyball players, athletic coaches, childhood friends, fellow parents, Montessorri enthusiasts, family, neighbors, and members of the Trinity Church community. *You are not alone*. We are here, even if we feel awkward or insufficient or don't know what to say. We are here to make you meals, and hold your hand, to listen and will not be afraid when you cry or fall apart. *You are not alone*. You are encircled by the love of God. You are watched over by your father and your husband whose love for you is stronger than death. Lynn when you were leaving the church office on Thursday after we planned this service I said to you, "The service is going to be lovely. Don't worry. We're going to take care of you." And you said that you felt like a weight had just left your shoulders. You physically relaxed. I want you to know that we are here, for the long haul, for each of

you. I want you to know that we are here to carry the part of your burden that can be shared, and to walk alongside you as you carry the burden that only you can carry. You are each deeply loved, deeply respected, deeply adored. Today is a good day, because you give us a chance to hold you and remind you that you do not walk alone.

Today is the worst day. And today is the best day. Today is about dying and living. Today is about despair and hope. We will not be overcome. Today we cling to the promises God has made to us. We are a resurrection people. We expect resurrection. We may not know how it all works, but we give our hearts to the mystery, saving grace, and eternal life that God promises us all. And because of the sure and certain hope that God is good to us beyond measure, we stand at the grave today and weep - while we also sing our song of praise and thanksgiving.

This afternoon, with all our hearts, to the best of our ability, we lift Troy up and release him into God's loving arms as we pray:

Today we give Troy back to you, O God, who first gave Troy to us; as you did not lose him in the giving, we do not lose him in his return. Amen.