

What was I thinking?

for Sunday, November 1, 2020

For All the Saints



MacLean cross, which stands beside a cobbled path called “Sraid nam Marbh” or “Street of the Dead,” a pathway from the boat landing to the sacred burial place on the Isle of Iona.

All Saints’ Day (or the Sunday on which it’s observed) has always been meaningful to me, and I’m sure like many of you, it becomes more meaningful the older we get. The more we live, the more people we get to know and develop relationships with. Eventually we lose those people we have come to know and love.

With each new church I’ve served, the first All Saints’ is moving, as the names of those who have died over the last year are read, but with each passing year, I recognize more of the names being read. I remember the people. I can see their faces and remember meaningful conversations we had. There is a mixture of sadness and solemn joy as we remember those we’ve lost, and celebrate that they have joined that great cloud of witnesses. Looking at this year’s list, I see the spouse of a Handbell Choir member, I see the names of several faithful members of the Mellows. I see the name of our beloved John Kipp.

Most churches send out letters to the family of church members who have died in the last year, letting them know their loved one's name will be among those read and inviting them to join us for this special service. To be honest, I was caught off guard when I, for the first time in my life, received the letter letting me know that my mother's name would be read this year. This is the first time someone in my family (other than my wife and son) was officially a member of a church I was serving.

If you've lost a loved one, you have experienced grief. It's not the same for any two people. There is no standard pattern of stages. Yes, the first year is hard, with the first birthday, holiday, or other special occasion when your loved one is not there. But the first year can be one of numbness, and you can be hit with those memories years later. It's not just special days, we can be caught by surprise at the mention of our loved one's name, by coming across a forgotten picture, or sometimes a random thought or a memory comes to us for no apparent reason, and we find ourselves suddenly in tears. Or, we see our loved one's name on the list for All Saints' Sunday.

There's a piece of organ music I've had on my "to learn" list for some time. I've heard my organ teacher, Marilyn Keiser, play it in recitals, including the one she did here a few years ago. The composer, Dan Locklair, lives in Winston-Salem, NC. He and Dr. Keiser have been friends for a long time, and she is a "champion" of his music. She's premiered many of his compositions, he has dedicated pieces to her, and she's recorded most of his organ works. I started learning his music when I was studying with Dr. Keiser. I met him in the years I was in Winston-Salem and we've had some good conversations. I attended a lecture he gave on his compositions, one of them a work for strings that he wrote in 2005 in memory of his mother. In 2014, he arranged an organ solo version of the piece, and it's the piece I've been meaning to learn.

Since my mother's death in April, I've been doing the hard work of grief, and with our world in turmoil, it's been especially hard. It's probably not a surprise that I have found comfort in music. In April pulled out Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, which is a heart-wrenching work. I practiced and played it but only for myself. Then I remembered Dan Locklair's piece and took another look at it. In the preface, a conductor who recorded the string version called it "a worthy successor to the Barber Adagio." I listened to the string version of Locklair's *In Memory – H.H.L.* and it brought me to tears. I knew then I had to learn the organ version. Through the composer's tribute to the memory of his mother, I was able to pay tribute to mine as well.

When I learn a new piece, there's usually a church service or a recital for which I intend to play it. This time I had no recitals on my schedule, and I wasn't sure if this piece was appropriate for worship. As I worked on the music, I had questions about

interpretation, and had a virtual organ lesson with my old teacher, Dr. Keiser, and she told me how she interprets the piece. Then I decided to e-mail the composer himself. (We can do that with living composers. Too bad we can't e-mail Bach with our questions!) Dr. Locklair and I exchanged some meaningful e-mails. I told him about my mother's death and he shared that he had lost a family member not long ago. We wrote about the difficulties of losing loved ones during this strange time. He wrote, "We walk the path of grief together, to be sure, and I am just so happy that *In Memory* – *H.H.L.* has given you some comfort from yours."

I had been playing the piece for my own benefit, and saving it for a recital some day, when we can perform in public again. Then I started thinking the piece might be appropriate for worship, so I wrote Dr. Locklair again and asked. His answer was, "Oh, yes!" That settled it. I changed my All Saints' prelude.

Dan Locklair wrote this about his composition:

The primary musical material for this short, single movement elegiac composition comes from the plagal cadence (IV-I). Since this cadence is often associated with the close of hymns on the word "amen," it has often been referred to as "the amen cadence." The finality of the word "amen" (meaning "may it be so") to a prayer or a hymn that is a prayer, seemed to me a most appropriate symbol of the musical remembrance for the finality of my mother's earthly life.

In loving memory of my mother, Hester Helms Locklair (1918 - 2005)

In Memory - H.H.L.

Organ solo version

Dan Locklair

Sw. to Ch. 8

Soft foundations,

Sw. to Ch. 8

Slow and serene ($\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 56$)

Organ

Sw. $\{ pp > p \}$ always very legato

Pedals

$p > pp$ always very legato

Gt.

Sw. (pp)

mf mp ppp mp

p pp p pp

s suggested registration may be tastefully modified, especially in order to fit organs with limited expressive capabilities.
 numerous hairpin dynamic markings are a part of the original string orchestra version of the piece. As with the registration,
 e may be modified and, if necessary, omitted, on organs with limited expressive divisions.

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Dan Locklair's *In Memory* – H.H.L.

In my lesson with Dr. Keiser, she pointed out the constantly changing meter. She asked, “You do have the beats written out over that 3/2 measure in red pencil, don’t you?” I do, but not in red pencil, and that had not been one of my questions. Always the teacher. Or maybe I should say, even at my age, always the student! Learning is a life-long process.

Other music this Sunday

Hymns:

Our Narrative Lectionary continues with the story of Elijah and the widow from 1 Kings. We will sing (you are singing the hymns at home, right?) the great Welsh hymn *Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah*. We’ll also sing *There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*, which,

though it has only two stanzas in our hymnal, the original may have had eight stanzas. Of course, we will be singing *For All the Saints*.

Solo:

I miss our choirs every week, but I'll especially miss them this Sunday. John Tsao and I will do an adapted version of what's become one of my favorite anthems, Malcolm Archer's *And I saw a new heaven*. I am always moved by the words: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Organ music:

The postlude tomorrow (hopefully the livestream gremlins won't get us again), will be a joyful setting of SINE NOMINE (*For All the Saints*) by William Bates. I had played a few of his pieces not knowing who he was, until I met him at a reunion at Indiana University. He's an IU graduate and is professor emeritus of organ and music history at the University of South Carolina. His setting of SINE NOMINE was written in memory of his father.

"I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also."

God be with you till we meet again.

God bless,

John