Scripture John 14: 1-7; Psalm 139: 13-18

I'm not sure how many of you have seen the Barbie movie, but there is a scene at the start when in the midst of a sparkly dance part at the Barbie dream house, surrounded by all the other Barbies, arm waving, music thumping, she cheerfully blurts out “do you guys ever think about dying?” record scratch, crickets chirp.

That is so often how our society feels about death. Lets not talk about, speak about it, think about it. Its really such a buzzkill, don’t dampen our moods with your somber thoughts of death.

And yet here, in our Christian tradition we have a day each year set aside to speak the names of those who have died and offer thanks for their lives.

I am grateful for this tradition where we are reminded of the truth of our mortality.

That we will die (you will die, i will die, death has no exceptions)

The fact that we do not live forever is what makes life so precious.

And Rare.

I mean, like, really rare.

Right this minute the Webb Telescope is shooting back images reminding us that the universe is billions of lightyears across. And as of now the only place where we are certain that life as we know it exists, is on this little tiny blue speck of a planet.

This is it, people. 13 billion light-years across and only here are there snowflakes and pizza and drive-in movie theatres.

That we are alive at all is miraculous. Singular. A gift.

Because life is so astonishingly brief, when we grieve the death of someone who has lived a long life, yes we are grieving their absence, but we are also celebrating all that messy and miraculous living they got to have.

Which also means that when we grieve the untimely death of children and young people and any who died too soon, we are grieving the loss of life that should have been lived.

We are grieving the years of life stolen.

We think of our own losses, those which are fresh and raw, those which have begun to heal, and those that are old wounds that still ack from time to time.

Each of those deaths has a wide circle of people who have grieved for them.

So when we are bombarded with the multitude of deaths on the news -the 1400 Israelis who were slaughtered in their homes, and the 15,000 and counting Palestinians who have been slaughtered in their homes/streets/schools, not to mention the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ethiopia, Sudan, Afghanistan…

I am reminded how each number in that rising death toll is a child of God who has a name.

A name spoken by their family when they were born, and spoken in school rooms and boardrooms and bedrooms. And their names, while unknown to us, are as much on the lips of those who are grieving them now as the names of our dead are on ours.

To be fair, Before you feel too overwhelmed, none of us can possibly stop and consider the emotional reality of every single tragedy. Anthropologically speaking, our psyches were developed to hold and respond to the human suffering in our village, not of our planet.

So as we remember our own dead, may we feel connected to the sorrow of those who are grieving elsewhere today. As our lord said: *Blessed are they who mourn*. Blessed are they who have loved enough to know what loss feels like.

Our scripture text today, from John 14, recalls the time of Jesus’ approaching death.

The disciples are anxious and fearful of losing him, but Jesus reassures them that death is not the final word nor is it a final separation from those we love.

Jesus said *“In my fathers house there are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?”*

* Despite the threatening circumstances the disciples and Jesus were facing, Jesus spoke with complete calm and assurance of the divine.
* He goes on to prepare a place, he said. Like how new parents excitedly prepare a place for a new baby, like a host lovingly sets up a room for their guests, Jesus is going ahead in love to prepare a place or a room/dwelling/mansion…

As I dwelt on this image of the many rooms in my father’s house, I found a poem that invites us to imagine the Holy One as a quilt maker who prepares a place for us – a home filled with the warmth and welcome of quilts.

**“In My Sister’s House” by Gerry Wolfram (2023)**

In my Sister’s house there are many quilts.

She goes now to prepare a place for you.

There are quilts of warmth and welcome,

quilts that speak of generations,

quilts remembering the maker –

She who made them

gathered up the bits of all things broken,

made them whole and beautiful as signs of new life:

comfort, healing, resurrection.

Quilts say welcome; you are precious,

quilts say refuge and community – communion of saints.

Quilts are a special thing.

* Some quilts are a gift made by someone who loves you, given as a gift for a new baby, new marriage, new chapter in your life.
* Some quilts are bought for a special bed or a special room.
* Some quilts are made for someone across the world, delivered to someone in need of warmth and comfort (MCC)
* Some quilts are made from new fabrics carefully selected
* Some are made from old scrapes, lovingly salvaged and reused.

We, as a community, maybe are a bit like a quilt.

We have a Creative maker, and master designer and quilter, who has created all of us, like a patchwork quilt, a host of fabrics, a host of pieces, all brought together, intricately interwoven into a family - a community.

As the Psalmist says: *You knit me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*

We are knit/ Quilted together (individually by God)/ communally by the love of God.

Quilted together by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ

Quilted together in faith by the Holy Spirit.

Every quilt has four basic parts:

* a top,
* a backing,
* a batting in the middle,
* and stitching to hold it together.

If the family of God is like a quilt: so too does the Master Quilt Maker, God, have four parts to the patchwork quilt called the Family of God.

* Just as a quilt has a backing or a 'foundation' so our patchwork quilt-the family of God-has a foundation. That foundation is our faith in Jesus Christ, our core beliefs and understanding of Word of God.
  + The faith that our traditions and practices are based on.
  + Foundations are not often admired but needed and appreciated for its stability.
* Every quilt must have a batting between the back/foundation and the top covering. It is this padding that provides support and warmth in the coldest of times. In the same way, God's word gives us the warmth of love and support that we need in every season of life.
  + These words/deeds of comfort flow from God through us to each other, to lift each other up, to comfort each other when we are hurt, sad or grieving.
* The top/outer covering is the side with the bright sunny colors! On this covering there are many fabric shapes, many different colors and patterns, all arranged to form a picture of beauty; like the family of God!
  + Crazy quilt
* Stitches hold the quilt together. If stitches in a quilt are not properly sewn, the quilt falls apart. We are assured that our quilt; the Family of God; is sewn together by the very love /presence of the Holy Spirit.
  + These stitches bind together all the layers
  + Same too, HS presence binds us as unique individuals down securely to our foundation along with God’s words of comfort and warmth
  + It is the stitches that make these layers into a quilt
  + And the HS that allows us to operate as a community of God.

In the John 14 text, Thomas asked *“Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?”*

Jesus responded “I am the way, the truth and the life”

We can be assured that as a community whose foundation lies in God, who is stitched together with the presence of the HS, we will find our way through any storms or losses.

As we speak the names of those who have been part of our own lifes journey, the Divine Quilter is there with us drawing us near, a quilt of comfort and warmth waiting for each of us.