

In seminary there is a class about weddings, baptisms and funerals. One of the words of wisdom from the professor is to keep in mind the congregation that has gathered to remember and celebrate the deceased. And as I look at this community, I recognize that it is a mixed group. Some of you know this church and know this pastor very well. Some of you are here for the very first time. Some of you are deep believers in the God of love, and some of you are not quite sure what to believe.

With that in mind, my prayer of preparation is most important.

May the words from my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O God, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. Grace and peace be with you on this day.

When I first met Fred, I almost swore that I knew him already. But then I realized I was mistaken because he was so unforgettable.

He was a complex man, the type of person who broke all stereotypes. I do believe that in his previous life he was rum drinking pirate.

Or a Polynesian surfer, or a sailing buddy of Earnest Hemingway.

I know about surfing and sailing. Not because I'm an aficionado of them, or any good at those activities, but because in the Caribbean, where I grew up, it was part of the culture. Just about anybody whose somebody in the islands does some surfing, sailing and fishing.

Surfers love the thrill of riding that which most people avoid, a big wave. Sailors love the thrill of riding that which escapes most people, the wind.

So, it could be said, Fred was a thrill seeker. The type of man who would go sailing to Cuba and surfing in Costa Rica.

And yet he had the nerdiest, and most square job there is, second only to ministers – he was an actuary.

An **actuary** is a professional with advanced mathematical skills who deals with the measurement and management of [risk](#) and uncertainty. Like me, Fred dealt with uncertainty. That's why I felt an affinity with him. Uncertainty did not raise red flags or create anxiety. Instead, he learn to manage it.

Before riding that wave, he could calculate on the spot, the risk of such an endeavor, and then enjoy the thrill of feeling the energy and power behind it

It's also indicative of another personality type. That of the lover.

The lover has calculated the best way to be in relationship, and it's through love.

I don't know how many of you know this, but Fred almost joined a monastery. He told me himself that when he was young, he thought he wanted to be Catholic monk. Even went as far as living with the monks for a season or two.

He would have been known as Father Fred.

The women would have called him Father What a Shame.

Yeah, he was a handsome devil with great hair, a deep tan, and a dazzling smile that only can be attained with the awareness that every minute of every day you're living the dream.

In many ways, Fred was the embodiment of Isaiah 40:31

*Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

He was a man of deep faith. Whose faith was one built not only on tradition but also on study and experience.

It was World Communion Sunday, when I went to visit Fred. He was, for all practical purposes, comatose in those final hours. As I offered the bread and the cup he woke up, and he managed to participate. It was his last act on this earth. Why? If you're already crossing to the other side, why bother to wake up from that divine slumber? The answer is obvious.

Because he believed. He had faith.

Fred knew that life required two things when facing the challenges and uncertainties thrown at us: faith and love. Faith, because you have to believe you will overcome and emerge on the other side of that wave. And Love, because life is better lived if lived in love.

And Fred loved. It was evident in all that he did. Most of all, he loved Dale.

He and Dale lived and shared a love that doesn't come around too often. It's a love that continues. Listen to my present tense. We can't talk about it as if it was something that happened in the past and now is gone.

Dale still loves Fred. Not the memory of Fred, but the essence of Fred, which according to our faith, still lives.

We read it in Paul's letter to the Romans: Nothing can separate us from the love of God, not life not death.

We read it in John 14: the notion that Jesus is preparing a place for us when we depart from this world.

To some people it sounds silly, but not to me.

Fred passed from this world, moving from one life to another, but the power of his love endures. Dale knows this to be true.

Anyone who has ever deeply loved knows this to be true.

Every once in a while, I come across people who tell me they are seeking spiritual enlightenment. They're chasing the elusive Nirvana.

My advice to them is to find love. To allow themselves to fall deeply in love and then to commit to that love. It is through love that we can find the doorway to heaven on earth.

To love deeply and faithfully is to enter the most spiritual exercise there is. Through love we can get glimpse of the Divine and access the Spirit of the Living God. And I believe, Dale, that you and Fred loved at that level.

Your grief today is an expression of that love.

Grief is love's unwillingness to give up. It's stretching bonds and redefining limits in order to create a space where you can love someone in their eternal absence.

We grieve because we first loved. Grief only exist where love first lived.

Now, from this pulpit I'm going to propose a hypothesis of sorts, a spiritual postulation. The gospel teach us that God is love. Therefore, I will state that love last longer than life. Love endures even though the body fails.

There is the presence of love in the absence of the physical.

Just go with me for a moment.

When becoming a parent for the first time, it is said that bringing a child into the world opens a door to a type of love we didn't know existed. Strange as it seems, I find myself believing that losing someone we deeply love does something similar.

When a beloved dies, in this case, Fred, his absence becomes its own presence. We come to love and hate his void. It represents all that is gone, all that we loved, all that miss. We hate the reality it represents - that he is physically missing from the world. But we also love the reality that it represents - that our love for Fred is so great that he is still "here", even when he is no longer physically here.

The absence of Fred allows us to tap into a new depth of love, one we didn't know existed. It feels like a depth we simply couldn't access while Fred was still alive.

So today we do more than remember and celebrate the life of a remarkable man. Today we celebrate love, the Divine element that makes life worth living. Today we learn from Fred and become actuaries of own lives and examine the risks and uncertainties of it. Let us come to the conclusion that the best way to ride this uncertain wave, called life, is with love.

It is the commandment given to us.

Let it be the final word.

AMEN