

Celebration of the life of Gabe Riley
3/23/17 Glastonbury HS

"I just wish he would come back."

Is there anyone here who doesn't, desperately, agree with this sentiment?

"I just wish he would come back."

That simple – and profound – insight was offered by
Gabe's little three-year-old sister Gracie
(at whose baptism I first met Gabe).

We *all* just wish he would come back.
Or, better yet, that he'd never left.

You don't have to be one of Gabe's nearest and dearest,
some of whom we've heard from so eloquently tonight,
to feel that, do you?
It's just not right.
He was far too young. So much loved. So full of light.

But I guess he didn't always feel that way.
(Like the rest of us, if we're honest.)
There's a quote about this I like that's attributed to
a lot of different people,
but I'm going to attach it to the Christian writer Anne LaMott;
it goes:
"Never compare your insides to everyone else's outsides."

I take that to mean, among other things,
that none of us always feel as bright and shiny and pulled together
as we might appear and,
by the same token,
even the dullest seeming among us have something to offer.

And that, I believe, is because God made us that way.
That's what I heard in the psalm Gabe's grandfather chose to read –
that we are wonderfully made, even our innermost parts.
And that God's fondest wish is to turn the darkness that sometimes covers us
back into light,
to show how much we're loved.

That passage from John's Gospel my friend and colleague
Denise Cabana read says something similar,
"The true light that enlightens everyone has come into the world."

Maybe this is why church people are so big on candles

(Denise and I both brought them from our churches).
 But let me point out this one special candle burning here.
 It's called a Paschal Candle,
 first lit every year on Easter Eve celebrating Jesus' life, death and resurrection.
 In Episcopal churches we light them not only on Easter,
 but for memorial services and baptisms.
 Gabe probably saw this one burning at his baby brother Henry's baptism
 last November.

For occasions like this, the candle reminds us of the love of God in Christ
 that shines in us no matter what,
 that God's love is with us no matter what,
 and that, no matter what, we are risen even in death into that light
 and love and new life.

I believe with all my heart that this is so for Gabe.
 Whatever darkness entered into that bright, funny, loving, dancing young man,
 whatever darkness that was so hard for the rest of us to see,
 God sees it and loves Gabe all the more.
 And although we join little Gracie in saying, "I just wish he'd come back"
 at this point
 it's for us to carry on the special light that was Gabe.
 It's for us to celebrate his life –
 not just tonight,
 but to honor him continually by sharing that light,
 by comforting his family,
 by looking out for each other,
 by shining the unique light that's within each of us.

To the young people here, especially,
 hear me loud and clear when I say that the best way you can shine that light,
 that you can honor and truly celebrate Gabe's life,
 is to ask for help when you need it
 (because like all of us, *you will*).
 You honor and celebrate Gabe's life when you don't
 "compare your insides to someone else's outsides"
 but realize that we all have moments of darkness,
 so let's be gentle with each other – and ourselves.

You honor and celebrate Gabe's life by growing up and doing us proud --
 yes, even growing OLD –
 still cherishing, still telling stories, still reaching out to the family –
 of a bright, shining, remarkable young man named Gabe Riley.

So be it: *Amen*.

