

The Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd

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All Souls, John 5:24-27

Very truly I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and...has passed from death to life (John 5:24).

In the name of God, Amen.

Sam Eyde celebrated his 150th birthday yesterday. Born in Norway on October 29, 1866, he studied engineering in Berlin. Following his graduation in 1891, Eyde started work with the railroad authority in Hamburg, until, six years later, he partnered with his first boss to start his own business. At the turn of the twentieth century, their partnership would become Norsk Hydro, a firm specializing in metals and hydro-electric power. In 2010, Norsk Hydro realized revenues of 75.75 *billion* NOK, or about \$13 billion US dollars.

In the early years of Norsk Hydro, the firm sought the natural force of waterfalls to power its electricity plants, which, in turn, powered massive factories at the sites. The search for these waterfalls took Eyde back to his native Norway, and among his first and most significant projects involved the *Rjukanfossen*, a spectacular, 304-foot natural waterfall...just imagine: a football field, turned on its side, and a waterfall running its length. Between 1905 and 1912, Eyde's firm founded a town at the falls – *Rjukan* – an undertaking which involved 12,000 Swedish, Danish, and Finish laborers at its peak, and cost two-times the Norwegian national budget to complete.

In 2016, Rjukan enjoys a mild summer, with the massive waterfall lending an idyllic soundtrack to the valley community. Long past its prime as industrial stronghold, the town's primary resource is now tourism, with many urbanites seeking refuge at the Rjukanfossen falls. However, as it has been since the community's founding more than one hundred years ago, from September to March of every year, the whole town of 3,400 – every man and every woman and every child...every home and every store and every school – lives in a shadow...*lives in shadow*.

Surrounded on all sides by substantial terrain, the tilt of the earth on its axis angles the sun's light upon the Rjukan valley in just such a way that casts the town in perpetual shade for those six months: while the sun bathes the snow-covered hilltops surrounding the township, sunshine never reaches the valley floor, and the community enters an eerie, blue-gray dark.

Long before diagnoses like "SAD" (Seasonal Affective Disorder) had been given credibility by the medical community, ol' Sam Eyde worried how the six months of dark would affect his townspeople, and, at least as importantly, how their winter malaise might decrease the productivity of his investment. Looking for a solution to keep his laborers laboring, he installed a cable car to ferry the townspeople from their dark valley, to a bright, mountaintop park above them. Still, however, their town remained dark...until three years ago.

Today we mark the Feast of All Souls, or “All Faithful Departed,” an occasion The Episcopal Church articulates in this way: “In the New Testament, the word ‘saints’ is used to describe the entire membership of the Christian community[, and, next Sunday, will celebrate All Saints’ Day]. Beginning in the Tenth Century, it became customary to set aside *another* day – as a sort of extension of All Saints – on which the Church remembered that vast body of the faithful who, though no less members of the company of the redeemed, are unknown in the wider fellowship of the Church. It was also a day for particular remembrance of family members and friends” (*Lesser Feasts & Fasts*, 412).

We mark this occasion and we remember our beloved, “because we still hold [those who have died] in our love...[For] our assurance as Christians is that nothing, *not even death*, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 862). With the occasion of All Souls we **shine a light** on our continuing connection with those we remember by name. In the wonder of the union between God’s creation and God’s heaven, God binds the living and the dead *to one another*, not by carnival crystal balls, but in the mystery of the intercommunion of saints we recognize today.

Indeed, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist, we announce this connection of heaven and earth, praying every Sunday with “angels, and archangels, and all the company of heaven.” That is, we join the unceasing prayers of those who have died before us, those for whom “life[, already] is changed, not ended” (*Book of Common Prayer*, 382). Those saints in light *fill* this holy space and every nook, cranny, and corner of our lives. There is, therefore, one Church – *one* Church – stretching across time and place...from generation to generation. Our speaking the names of those we love during these Requiem liturgies draws them nearer to us, and lifts our hearts nearer to them. We present ourselves and our beloved before God’s Love, and God declares all of us as precious and significant, holy and good.

Near Sam Eyde’s birthday in 2013, Rjukan unveiled “The Mirror Project,” a municipally-funded undertaking to reflect light into the town square. At the top of one of its surrounding hills, town officials installed three large mirrors to catch the sun’s light and reflect it into the town below. A computer system guides the solar-powered mirrors to follow the sun’s path across every day’s sky, providing a constant glow in the center of their fellowship.

By this story, one might relate how, in a world beset by shadow and darkness, there is the light of God, reflected in the lives of God’s saints throughout the world...rays of sun, beams of hope. And that would be fine, even good. However, what strikes me about Rjukan is the Mirror Project’s *scope*. Naively, when I first read the headline concerning the mirrors, I thought they would somehow light the whole town, that the attendant video to the news article would be a stop-motion production revealing a warm, pink light moving gently and steadily across storefronts and rooftops and newly-greened lawns until the whole town would be awash in a new morning. Instead, the mirrors create a relatively small oval of light on the town square, a spotlight of sun no larger than a basketball court...and, yet, somehow that one splash of Rjukan sunlight *has* brightened the whole town. On the day of the unveiling, shop owners took the day off work; schools closed; children boasted brightly colored suns painted on their cheeks; and everyone took turns walking in and out of the warm beam, smiling wide and shading their eyes with a hand to their happy brows. Where there had been darkness, there was now light.

Today, we gather together to stand in the warm light of God's one Church...in the Communion of *all* the Saints, in heaven and on earth. While our gestures are modest – names spoken, songs sung, prayers prayed – we find in these simple acts the Stewardship of our very souls, recognizing and engaging the Light of God within us and all around us. In celebration of All Souls, we do not profess to séances or magic, but to mystery and marvel, the wonder of God's majesty, and by so doing we announce that hope *does* endure; that love *does* continue; and that life – indeed! – conquers death.

In the name of the one who conquered death, let us steward this good light. *Amen.*