

The Muslim taxi driver was talkative that day as he picked me up from our house at the Virginia Theological Seminary. First, he marveled at the flock of birds across the field. Then he said with authority, “This is not a normal place.” I thought to myself, “You don’t say!” After a pause, he went on, “I feel spirits here.”

“Are they evil spirits?” I asked.

“No, good spirits. I can feel them.”

After pondering a bit, I suggested, “Well, some of these houses are very old. Maybe people died here in their homes.”

Then he asked, “Is there a cemetery here?”

“Well, yes, I’ll show you as we go out.” As we drove along Seminary Road, I pointed to the cemetery on a slope nestled under the trees.

“Ah,” he said, “That’s it.” Then as we turned on Quaker Lane, he said, “This is where my friend felt the spirits when we were driving down this street.” Then our conversation went on to other things. Yet he left me thinking. “This is not a normal place.” He felt good spirits.

I remembered the people I knew about who lived there and were buried there. The first was a faculty wife who died my first summer here. Someone gave me the tip that because many maintenance men were on vacation our son as a teenage summer employee probably would be part of the grave digging. At the end of the day I asked him, "How was your day? What did you do today?"

"Dug a grave," was the muttered reply. Then he went on to talk about helping Wayne, the biggest and strongest in the department as he dug the grave and remembered her. "For twenty years she was always kind to me. I guess this is the last favor I'll do for her." Good spirits indeed—both the grave digger and the lady he honored.

There were others. The mentally and physically handicapped son of Bishop Mark Dyer. The son of the former dean who died in a car crash on his honeymoon in Mexico, an exuberant young man full of the joy of teaching, himself a product of Shrine Mont summer camps. Then the most revered of professors, the one I hear alumni speak of most often. Yes, good

spirits lived and died in what the tax driver said was “not a normal place.”

All were good spirits who were generous with their lives, poor in spirit, pure in heart.

These are among the spirits we remember as we observe All Saints Day. We remember all those who have been declared saints by the church through the ages. In the spirit of today’s date, All Souls Day, we remember those who walked this earth with us, who shaped us and live on in us.

That Muslim taxi driver lifted up what we call the communion of saints, the way that in God’s great mystery the living and the dead communicate in the life of the spirit. Here is the great Oneness. We are all one across time and space. We are one across the boundaries created by well meaning humans in an effort to make sense of our life and our world—the categories of religions, sciences, races, and nations.

Last week at Kanuga Conference Center, Eben Alexander told the story of his transformative experience of seven days in a coma with a form of meningitis which gave him zero chance of recovery. Himself a

neurosurgeon, he wrote his best selling book, Proof of Heaven, shortly afterwards and now has had several years to reflect. In his near death experience, he entered a realm of Light and Love, an experience of oneness with the God of Love. He speaks of a “dazzling darkness” and a beautiful melody that still haunts him. The companion who led him through gave him this message: “You are deeply loved and cherished forever. You will be taken care of. You have nothing to fear. You can do no wrong.” In response to this experience, he says, “Gratitude is the only thing that makes sense.”

We also heard Raymond Moody who devoted his career to listening to such experiences and noting the consistent patterns. He sums it up saying, “There are no words”—no words sufficient to describe this great mystery, this connection between the living and the dead, this experience of the Light at the core of reality, this ocean of God’s love.

These scientists were clear: “To be a modern scientific thinker is to be aware that there is a God and there is a soul.” The God of love at the core of

reality is scientific fact, they say. We people of faith have known that for a long time. The trouble is that we have all too often succumbed to a false rationality. We have let our mystical tradition slip to the side, trying to keep pace with a technological world. Now science pops up to remind us of a mystical reality that has been ours all along, the mystery that connects us all—the living and the dead.

Today is one of the four top festivals in our calendar, the only one that can be transferred. Here is the white color of resurrection—fitting because at one time it came during Easter Week or the Sunday After Pentecost. It is another Easter, the Easter of the saints whom we celebrate.

One symbol of resurrection is the butterfly. In Eben Alexander's near death experience there were millions of butterflies. The guide who carried him through took him flying on a butterfly wing. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, that authority on death and dying, tells of carvings found in the Nazi death camps where children were housed before their deaths. What did they carve? Butterflies.

The course of our life is like the life cycle of a butterfly—caterpillar, chrysalis, butterfly. Today we gather as people with all the limitations of earthly life. We are caterpillars who will someday enter the chrysalis of death. Yet we know on the other side there is life, the radiant life of the resurrection. The communion of saints connects us to that life beyond death. We catch a fleeting glimpse of the butterfly that brushes our cheek with a touch from beyond.

So now we gather at the table where heaven and earth meet. We join with angels and archangels and with all the company of heaven, with saints of the past and saints yet to come. Let us welcome the spirits who have shaped us. Let us become good spirits to bless others as we have been blessed. May it be said of this place: “This is not a normal place. There are good spirits here.” And to that we say, Alleluia.