

Sunday, April 20: Gabriel's Oboe (Easter Sunday)

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<https://open.spotify.com/track/6opPrJUpq4Pl5c84eCwLmo?si=cd01898c287d446a>

My father died earlier this year. He died peacefully, on his own terms, with family bedside. The last time we went to the hospital, my dad knew this was his final visit. He told the medical team he was ready to die. When he was moved from the ICU to hospice care, we gathered around his bedside knowing the days and hours were growing thin. He wasn't able to say much, the strength was leaving his body. But he held each of our hands, gave us a slight nod, and whispered to each of us: "I love you." He died in the middle of the night, peacefully and humbly, the same way he lived his life. Amidst the chaos of hospital visits, medical treatments, anxiety and fear that had been ever present in the years prior, somehow my father brought us peace, even in his death. It was, I believe, his final gift to us.

In John 14, Jesus says to his disciples as he prepares for his own death: *Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

I don't think I fully understood this passage until this past year. After all, how can there be peace in death? How can we tame our troubled hearts and still our trembling bodies? I've been thinking a lot about peace in the midst of death. We often associate death with chaos and unrest and turmoil. After all, the cross was marked by betrayal, suffering, violence, and pain. But Jesus' death didn't lead to chaos. His death, which was meant to upend and to shatter and to end, instead, his death led to peace. And three days later, resurrection, not death, had the final word, the ultimate act of peace. Only in the gift of Christ's peace, that peace which surpasses all understanding, does death lead us to peace.

The song "Gabriel's Oboe" is the theme of the 1986 movie "The Mission." The Mission tells the story of a Jesuit missionary in 18th century South America. The story is chaotic and brutal and ugly, as it faces the darkness of human sin, slavery, and colonialism. But in the midst of the chaos comes this song. The melody breaks through the chaos, and a transcendent calm settles in its place. It's salve for the weary soul, beauty in the midst of brutality, peace for the broken, sinful, and fallen human.

I don't know if my dad knew this song or watched the movie—although I suspect he would have loved both. But this song always reminds me of my father. Like this melody, he was able to bring peace to even the most chaotic moments. Like this melody, he brought calm to our family.

This summer, we buried my father's ashes at Camp Highroad's EcoEternity forest. The ashes are buried at the foot of a memorial tree. The tree is tall and majestic, just like my dad. Its branches give us shade and rest from the sun. It watches over our kids as they play at the foot of the tree. There is profound calm and peace, and in the distance, a tranquil melody playing.