

**LUX ET VERITAS; GENESIS 1:1-5; LENT TWO/MASTERWORK/MARCH 1, 2015;
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The first book of the Bible, *Genesis*, begins in light and the last book of the Bible, *Revelation*, ends in light.

Revelation, in describing the City of God, to which the dead shall be raised, says in its penultimate chapter, “there shall be no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light and its lamp is the Lamb.”

Both of these worlds – Eden and the City of God – are bathed in God’s healing, rescuing light. It is curious that God did not stop with Eden but allowed the man and the woman the freedom to choose to remain there or to enter another world – this world – so filled with pain and suffering. Pain and suffering not just for you and me, the descendants of the man and the woman, but also for God.

God foretold the suffering that would result from their choice. And we have seen God’s proclamation fulfilled in century after century of war, greed and death.

That God would choose to make this journey with us is surely one of the great narrative plots of all time – a suffering God, a God who knows first hand our grief and remorse, the bitter tears of our guilt and loss.

And yet, perhaps we should not be so surprised for in the first line of the creation account the story teller says, when the earth was welter and waste and darkness God’s “ruah” in the Hebrew, translated “God’s breath/wind/spirit,” was hovering over the deep.

The biblical word for “hovering” here is used elsewhere to describe a female eagle hovering, fluttering in the thermal currents over her young. The storyteller suggests this God is a protecting, nurturing parent, like a mother eagle who one day will nudge her chicks from the nest.

I wonder if what theologians have called our ‘fall from grace,’ our expulsion from Eden is not merely an act of rebellion but also a necessary act to become human; an act that required our departure from the safe, insulated nest of the Garden and our entering into the world on our own.

What stays with me, as we prepare to listen to Morten Lauridsen’s magnificent work this morning is the image of that hovering ruah of God who knows that her cherished human creation must leave the nest of innocence to make our way, imperfectly, even destructively, to return one day not to the nest from which we came but to God’s city.

That’s what this requiem and every requiem are about – the return of God’s people to the heavenly community where he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes and pain and suffering will be no more;

a realm where death does not exist;

a realm where fullness of being, not as fledging chicks but as God’s healed and restored people dwell together in safety and peace with their Creator.

Beyond the current political wars in Washington and the present chaos and upheaval in the Middle East—including Syria and Iraq; Israel and Palestine; the repressive regimes of the once hopeful Arab Spring, including Russia and Ukraine, Afghanistan; and Iran with its nuclear ambitions;

beyond all of this death and destruction that seems a black hole consuming sanity and civilization is the hard fact of death right here in our own community.

Since All Saints 2014, the first Sunday of November, we have held seven memorial services in this sanctuary; perhaps most poignantly, last Tuesday, Shawn Hewitt, just thirty years old. Each one of them loved, laughed and celebrated life as only they, each, individually could love, laugh and celebrate life. And there is no one to fill the gap they left or the empty place that remains in the lives of their families.

What this Masterwork is about is remembering the promise that they are lifted into God's *lux aeterna*. And not just them, but all of our loved ones. All of them, lifted, healed, forgiven, made new.

Paul Salamunovich, the celebrated conductor of the Los Angeles Master Chorale and world authority on Gregorian chant for whom Morten Lauridsen composed *Lux Aeterna* said, last year before his own death, that "Prayer is the lifting of the heart and mind to God. This music," he said, "is the perfect prayer, and whenever I perform it, it is my way of communicating not just to people but to my God."

Lauridsen said simply of his composition that it was a "quiet meditation on illumination and it makes no difference who they are or what they do, people who hear it connect with it."

It is the sublime braiding together of music and words that make that connection, and the composer's dialogue with the biblical story. Lauridsen, a serious student and daily reader of poetry, cannot have been unaware that the term in Genesis for the darkness and chaos out of which light and creation were brought forth – "tohu wabohu" – occurs only once at the beginning of the biblical narrative.

Likewise, you'll see and soon hear that the phrase "lux aeterna" the peace-filled fulfillment of creation we return to appears only once in Lauridsen's masterpiece – at the end.

If darkness and chaos is what we come from, then after the wars, disease, injustice and sorrow, healing, rescuing, eternal light is what we come home to. Amen.