



In the Light of Christ, Love never ends...

When we gathered here a few moments ago, we began our worship by declaring the promises Jesus gives us, the promises that just as he shared our human life with us, so we share his resurrection ... we are all lifted up, in life new and everlasting.

I am the resurrection and the life says the Lord, and through me all will be lifted up to life anew.

And we lit the most beautiful candle in the Church. This is the Easter candle, the candle that we light anew each year as we celebrate Jesus' resurrection from the dead. It is only lit in church for baptisms and for services where those who have died are commended into God's love. Services of loss, and services of birth. Birth and death are the two things which happen to all humanity, the coming from our creator, and the returning to him. Jesus promises us, that when we die, that itself is a new birth, a birth into a newness of life, where love and grace are unending. Death is not the end of anyone, resurrection is...

When we light this candle on that dark night before Easter dawn, we then all light our own candles from it.... The light of the love of God, shattering the darkness. And as we do, slowly the church fills with light. The light of love and promise in our hearts, the flame of God's love. Later, we extinguish those candles, but the flame of love continues in our hearts, and so we carry God's love too with us wherever we go. S. Paul tells us '*love never ends*'... and we know that to be true as love is what has drawn us here today.

As children of God, we are given the gift of prayer. The gift of connection with each other. The gift that brings us together in grief and loss; in hope, promise and healing. We gather as God's holy church to pray for those who have died.

- To name tenderly before God those who we love and hold in our hearts,
- to pray for those who have no one to pray for them... those on the edges of society, or lost in the mists of time,
- and to pray for those who we find it hard to pray for, perhaps those who have caused us pain, or caused great pain to others in the world, those who we find it challenging to pray for, and for whom few others than those of faith will pray; those painful figures of history, and those perhaps more close to home.

For not one will be lost, says the Lord in our gospel today. Not one. And everything can be healed. There is no time and no place and no-one who is outside of God's love. *I will not lose one of those you have given me*, he says.

Our loved ones are safe, gathered into love, and we shall meet again.

Because we know that at the end of all time God will gather all into his loving mercy, as our duty and our joy we pray that there, those who have had challenging journeys in the world and fallen far astray from the ways of love may be through the fire of God's Love restored to the person they were created to be. That there will be healing peace and redeeming justice for those who have been hurt by others. We pray also that those who have been lost and unknown in this life may know themselves known by name and held in a love so tender they never imagined. And we pray with love for those who have blessed us in this life, and love us still.

Prayer – and the power of prayer – is a real force for life and love in this world. The prayers we offer on behalf of the dead are a real force of blessing and healing for them as they travel into God's love, as the prayers of those to come after us will be in turn for us. And the prayer we offer now is a real force of healing, compassion and companionship, a connection with the love of God and of each other.

And so we also pray for ourselves and for each other. For even as we rejoice in the promises of God, we also have sadness and pain to offer up. There is a beautiful image in the Old Testament of God swooping down into the desert of our loneliness and despair and gathering us up on his wings when we are too weary to walk any further.

This is the strength that Isaiah mentions in our reading today; the strength that lifts us to carry on and to live and love each day, even when our hearts are weary and sad, and to be surprised and strengthened on our journey by love and hope, celebration and thanksgiving. God knows our sorrows and our pains; Jesus wept at the death of Lazarus his friend, and at the sorrow of his loved ones, he looked in sorrow at the suffering of his mother as he died on the cross. And he holds all our hurts in his hands. The hands of the crucified and risen Lord.

In heaven, the book of revelation tells us all tears are wiped away, all pain and sadness is gone, and there is an unending love; the unending love that those who have gone before us hold us in each day, and the love in which we shall be united. All shall be made new.

In the film which you may have seen, called *The Passion of the Christ*, Jesus is walking the path to the cross, and he carries the huge cross on which he will be crucified. Our Lord God, carries all the pain of the world on his back. All the pain that makes no sense, that hurts and aches and seems like an ending. The cross of all pain, all sadness, all hurt is carried in his love. He stumbles and falls, as we all do, so often with all we carry in our hearts.... And his mother rushes to him... she looks at him and she says Son, what are you doing? Why are you doing this?

And he simply says

"behold, I am making all things new"

Jesus takes our pain, and he takes our death, and he takes all that hurts and aches, and he brings it through into new life. When Jesus is resurrected, it is the marks of pain on his hands that mean that Thomas recognises him as the Lord of Life and Love. Jesus knows, and he holds it for us and with us, and he takes us through the pain to a place where we can carry it in his life, and his strength.

And so, in our faith, we have cause for celebration too. We celebrate the lives, and the love, that we have shared. We celebrate the resurrection promises we have that tell us love never ends, and that one day we will be together again in a grace and joy we cannot imagine, and we give thanks for the strength and the love that carries us through when we are tired, weary and sad.

So... on days when things hurt, breathe slowly, open your hands and ask God to hold them. Look at them and remember the marks of love on the hands of our God, who loves us beyond all measure, who walks the way of pain with us, and lifts it to new life. Ask his presence, his strength and claim his promises.

In the name of Christ we pray
Amen