

In the Light of Christ, Love never ends…

Yesterday / this morning we gathered to celebrate the great feast of All Saints. To celebrate the company of heaven – those who are gathered in rejoicing into God's presence. We remembered how inspired we can be by others' stories, how touched and blessed by others' love, and that those gifts are not something that end with death.

Today / tonight we come together tenderly to give thanks and to remember that this truth touches all and everyone, throughout all age and in all place.

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.

There will be mixed emotions in this church right now. Long-carried griefs and losses, still tender and soft after years of learning how to carry that loss of the person you love at your side, and even now the times when that grief is sharp and overwhelming. There will be raw, new grief, that we are still learning how to breathe round, and how to accept. There will be complicated griefs, with complicated stories and challenges and regrets. Human story brings so many joys and so many complexities.

But here today is a safe place to bring those feelings. To name those who have died, and to ask God to do the holding with us for another year. To give thanks for the blessings of sharing life with someone we love. To commend to God the challenges and sadnesses of complicated relationships, and difficult grief.

Today we do something beautiful too. We don't just gather here to remember those on our hearts, but here in our prayers we bring all those who God created. We bring those whose names no-one knew, or remembers. For no-one is forgotten in his love.

We even bring those whose path through life was broken and difficult, and left pain and damage behind them, who meet God's justice - for these children of God, whose lives were so broken, need our prayers too as they journey through God's healing love to rediscover the beautiful babies they once were, and to redeem all suffering and shadow.

Because we know that at the end of all time God will gather all into his loving mercy, and all will be made new, and all hurts and griefs brought to peace and joy.

And as we come, with all those we bring in our hearts, we bring too all those that were carried in *their hearts too*... and the love

and the prayer ripples out, heart by heart and story by story until all the world is touched and held.

Today we will light candles. Candles of thanksgiving. Candles of hope. And those candles will shine up to heaven alongside all the other candles lit this day in churches all around the world, and all through the centuries. In God's love, all that light is gathered to become part of the light of heaven, blessing the saints and angels, and shining back on us in love and strength and blessing. And we will pray. Whether that's fancy prayers with lots of words, or just holding a name – a person – before God in this space. God knows. And he will hold.

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. 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, that hold us in his love.

Jesus takes our pain, and he takes our death, and he takes all that hurts and aches, and makes no sense and seems like an ending - and he brings it through into new life. 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 gift of life that we are given – each day we are given to live and love on this earth, and the hearts we touch and share on our journey. We celebrate the resurrection promises we have that tell us love never ends. We remember the joy from this morning / yesterday and that great party in heaven that we celebrated – and we give thanks. Our loved ones are safe in joy and goodness, and we give thanks that one day we will be together again in a grace and joy we cannot imagine, and 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, and takes all death through to life. And ask his presence, his strength and claim his promises. And if you don't have the words – don't worry. He can read them straight out of your heart. Just hold your heart before him, and let him fill it with his love.

And so… in the name of Christ we pray …

Amen