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Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon :
November 11, 2018 ~ “All Souls”
“Twenty-Second Sunday of Trinity”

Remembering Service for All Souls 11 November 2018

I say again what I said at the start of this service: you are all very welcome here tonight. But I do not underestimate how difficult it will have been for many of you to have come. Many of you are still feeling very sad and numb with shock at the death of family or friend, whenever it was. People often casually say ‘time heals’ but I am not sure it does quite so easily as some imagine. Both my parents died after illness – so, yes, I am glad for them that their suffering is over – but I still miss them in many different ways. For each of us in this Church this evening, here to mourn someone we love, the pain of their death is still real, however thankful we may be for their life.

And remembering is what we often do all the time, as human beings. The word ‘remembering’ is defined in the dictionary as ‘being able to bring to one’s mind an awareness of someone that one has known.’ That is often what we do – to bring to mind an awareness of our loved ones, maybe with the help of photos or possessions or something we associate with them. It might be their favourite food or drink, or a place they loved or their handwriting in a letter. Sometimes we are even lucky enough to have a recording of their voice. I went to a memorial service recently and the person who had died had once been recorded on Radio 4 – and it was thrilling to be able to hear his voice once again.

In all of this, however, nothing can hide the fact that the person we have loved has died. There is a great gap in our lives, which time often does not heal. But I hope that you might, in time, be able to give thanks for what was rather than have regrets

for what might have been. That sort of sentiment is often expressed in many of our songs and hymns, readings and poetry.

As you might imagine, I have heard and read many words at funerals during my 40 years of work in the Church. Everyone has their favourite. I like the lines that Joyce Grenfell, the comedienne, wrote: “If I should go before the rest of you, break not a flower nor inscribe a stone, nor when I’m gone speak in a Sunday voice. But be the usual selves that I have known. Weep if you must, parting is hell, but life goes on, so sing as well”.

And some of you have used the words of a piece called ‘She/He is gone’. Included by the Queen on the order of service for the Queen Mother's funeral in 2002, the poem was originally credited to 'Anon'. After the Queen Mother's funeral much effort went into attempts to identify the author, before he was discovered to be a former baker David Harkins from Cumbria. It goes like this:

“You can shed tears that they have gone or you can smile because they have lived. You can close your eyes and pray that they will come back or you can open your eyes and see all that they have left. Your heart can be empty because you can't see them, or you can be full of the love that you shared. You can turn your back on tomorrow and live yesterday or you can be happy for tomorrow because of yesterday. You can remember them and only that they have gone or you can cherish the memory and let it live on. You can cry and close your mind, be empty and turn your back or you can do what they would want: smile, open your eyes, love and go on”.

In our reading from the last book of the Bible, the writer is trying to portray what heaven will be like, using fairly exotic language – and some find helpful that picture of heaven as being a place of no more suffering or pain. Millions of other words have been written to try to express the grief we feel at someone’s death. But sometimes, just sometimes, there is nothing that can be said – only the sound of silence.

My hope and prayer for all of you here this evening is that you will be able to take something from this service to give you comfort and hope – something that might gently help you smile, open your eyes, love and go on. Amen.