

Revd Michael Burns
Christ Church West Wimbledon
Sermon : November 10th, 2019
“All Souls”

ALL SOULS SERVICE 2019

In welcoming you here this evening, I am all too aware that, for many of you, it has not necessarily been an easy decision to come along to this Service. All of us here are bound by one thing – we are here to remember someone we love who has died, whether that death was in recent months or a long time ago. The long list of names I will read out is both of those who have died in the past year and also of those who have died in the years before – and that says that the pain and grief are still there, however long ago it was.

Yet, although for many here this evening there is sadness, I hope too that there may perhaps be a sense of thankfulness. Someone wrote ‘Say not in grief that they are no more, but in thankfulness that they were’. I do not know who said that but it is a saying that has influenced the way that I tend to approach the conducting of funerals for those who have died. Those of you whose relatives’ funeral services I have conducted in this past year will know that I almost always begin by stressing that the funeral is a service for thanksgiving for the life that was – though of course the younger the person was the harder that is to say or take in. So while thankfulness might have seemed appropriate at the time as the weeks and months pass, those who are left often feel that their bereavement is not getting any easier, that the pain of the loss is negating any feelings of thankfulness – and if anything it is all much harder to bear.

Yet in whatever mood you are today – whether you feel full of thanks for the person who has died, or whether you are still choked full of grief, anger and shock, or whether you are just resigned to what has happened and you feel numb and lonely, I hope you will feel that it is good that you have come to Church this evening – to spend time with others,

many of whom you will not know – but all of us drawn together because we have all suffered the loss of loved ones who have been a part of the community.

But we also know that everything takes time – and that is certainly true as we begin to come to terms with the death of a loved one. We need time to adjust, time for what has happened to sink in – time when we can feel all sorts of negative emotions – and above all when we are remembering – doing lots of remembering. But then we can find that this leads, eventually, to an acceptance – and even perhaps a looking forward. Someone has described it all as a dark tunnel – but a tunnel where there is light to be seen at the other end, however long the tunnel may prove to be.

In all this, for those who try to cling to Christian beliefs, there is an awareness of being led by God. That's not to deny that the road has been very rough and jagged, but perhaps a realisation that God is there to hold us and to love us – and to remain with us. We may continue to be alone – but we are not lonely. Of course, often when we are faced with the death of someone we love, we can feel that God is far away, that he has deserted us, that the small amount of faith we did have has been completely blown away. Yet when we feel like that, we are perhaps subconsciously echoing the words of Jesus on the cross, who felt exactly the same: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' he cried out to his heavenly Father.

And strangely enough, in all this, people who suffer the death of a loved one can also feel that they are given strength to carry on, to be far stronger than they thought possible. In a crisis, we expect a loving God to be with us. He is – and he wants us, especially in such moments, to trust him even when we are in the depths. When you are at rock bottom, you discover the rock.

Maybe from today, after you have shed tears, lit a candle and said Amen to the prayers – you may be able to walk out of the door feeling just that little bit stronger and able to say, through your sadness and grief – thank you for what was.