

## St Michael's Memorial service 31 10 21

### Ps 23, 1 Peter 1 v 3-9

Psalm 23 is probably one of the best known of all the psalms. The descriptions used in it speak first of the countryside where a shepherd leads his flock, ensuring that their everyday needs are supplied and that they are protected and cared for. The second part of the psalm speaks of a banquet where there is not only enough but and abundance. "My cup overflows" it says. Between these two sections is a verse which talks about going through a valley.

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil for you are with me." Images can sometimes be helpful in understanding something which it is hard to describe. The psalmist tells us that the shepherd cares for his sheep and that he leads them through the valley not into darkness but to a banquet. I have to say that I quite like the idea of the kingdom of heaven being compared to a banquet.

The church teaches that for the Christian death is not the end but a new beginning and as the sun sets on this life it raises on a new and richer life in the nearer presence of God. In this psalm we have the reassurance that this is not a journey we have to make alone for God is with us each step of the way

It is our Christian inheritance that we journey towards through this world to eternity and God walks with us each step of the way even through the darkest moments of our lives.

In our life there will inevitably be times when we find ourselves going through difficult circumstances The circumstances of these trials and tribulations will vary.

Some we will feel we cope with better than others.

Most of us here this evening have experienced the grief of bereavement. Over this last twenty months the pandemic has meant that we have all, to a greater or lesser degree, suffered loss of a different kind. The touch of another human being, the freedom to travel abroad on holiday,

our business, job, home or simply, person social interaction. So much of our lives has been altered and things are not the same as they were, and we wonder “will things ever be the same again” or are we destined to live in what is labelled the “new normal” for the foreseeable future or even the rest of our lives.

This is additionally hard when it is combined with the loss of someone we love when there isn't even the normality of life to cling on to.

The letter of Peter which we heard read reminds us that in this life we do go through various trials The Greek word he uses is Poikilos which literally translated is “many coloured”. Our sufferings may be many coloured and at times the shadows surrounding us so dark that we can't see the light at the end of the tunnel, but God has promised that his grace is sufficient to hold us through each and every moment.

We often speak of being torn apart by grief. And it does feel just like that. It is important to grieve, to express the

loss, to acknowledge the pain and loneliness and often with all these emotions we find it hard to see the love of God.

But it is important to remember that it is love which spans that chasm that separates life in this world with the continuing essence of life in the nearer presence of God.

Joan Mary Fry put it this way

“For those we love it is no longer a dark place of shadows but an entrance into the fuller light of God. Though we naturally grieve at the withdrawal of loved “ones” from our physical sight, we may still rejoice in their new freedom.”

It is that connection with Gods faithful and steadfast love which links and binds us to those we love and have lost.

Cardinal Basil Hume said “It is the love of God, warm and true, which will touch the grieving heart and heal it. He looks at the grieving person and has pity, for grief is a

great pain. He came among us (*in the person of Jesus*) to learn about grief and much else too, this Man of Sorrows. He knows. He understands.”

I'd like to leave you with the words of a poem by Margaret Fishback Powers,

One night I dreamed a dream.

As I was walking along the beach with my Lord.

Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life.

For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand,

One belonging to me and one to my Lord.

After the last scene of my life flashed before me,

I looked back at the footprints in the sand.

I noticed that at many times along the path of my life, especially at the very lowest and saddest times, there was only one set of footprints.

This really troubled me, so I asked the Lord about it.

"Lord, you said once I decided to follow you,

You'd walk with me all the way.

But I noticed that during the saddest and most

troublesome times of my life,

there was only one set of footprints.

I don't understand why, when I needed You the most,

You would leave me."

He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will

never leave you

Never, ever, during your trials and testings.

When you saw only one set of footprints,

It was then that I carried you."