

**Memorial Service Sermon by Rev Jane Kraft, 27th October 2019
at St Michael's Church, Sandhurst**

Reading: Revelation 21:1-7

We are here today to remember and to give thanks for those people who we love but are no longer with us. It is important to bear in mind that while we mourn their loss and the reality that we are not able to speak with them or share our life experiences with them, they touched our lives in a very special way and what they gave us in the time we shared together can never be taken away.

Memory is a strange thing. Recent memories are often very vivid and dominate our thoughts. This is often the case when someone we love dies following an illness; our recent memories are of those last weeks and months or perhaps days. They can be painful and upsetting and make the loss even harder to bear.

Sometimes at funerals relatives request a poem to be read, one such piece has the line in it which states "Death is nothing at all" and I want to shout "how can you say that" death is not nothing at all to those who are left behind, it is just about the most overwhelming, devastating and distressing thing that can happen.

It's hard to see beyond the present darkness of grief to past times and happier days. But thoughts of those happier times will emerge, and you will be able to remember with less pain and smile at memories of times shared together with those you are now parted from.

We are each on a journey through this life but in bereavement we find ourselves in that in-between place, there are things behind us in the past, memories of happier times and we do not know what the future holds but for now we exist in this liminal space looking back and knowing that our life will inevitably move forward and not feeling comfortable and at ease with the present and yet not wanting to shift from it to another place because life will be different.

There may be days when you feel you are coping really quite well then suddenly some word or event will trigger a memory and the grief which you had tucked away surfaces with all the intense poignancy of the early days of bereavement.

You will each have your own experiences of mourning the loss of a loved one and each one of you is in a different place and at a different stage of bereavement. Always remember that no one should tell you how to grieve and certainly not try to impose a time scale on the mourning process.

It has been said that "The loneliness does linger, Life will indeed never be the same. Nevertheless it may be good." *Anon.*

The church teaches that for the Christian dying is not the end but a new beginning. The start of a new and fuller life in God's nearer presence where pain and physical restrictions are no more.

We don't know what heaven is like, The Book of the Revelation of St John the Divine tries to describe it in terms we are familiar with while telling us that things will be different because the old has passed away and all things are new.

Later on in this service you will have the opportunity to light a candle in memory of those whom you love but through their death you have lost.

The living flame you kindle from the Pascal Candle is a reminder of Jesus who said I am the light of the world and who by his death and resurrection overcame the power of death that we might live with him forever.

In many churches early on Easter morning the congregations gather in the semi darkness outside their local church buildings to celebrate Christ's resurrection. As they stand in the darkness they light the first fire of Easter and from that flame, the new Pascal candle is lit and is carried into the dark church. Three times they pause as the proclamation the "Light of Christ" is made.

It is the only light in the dark building but from this living flame they light the candles held by each person present. This symbol of the risen Christ, the light of the world, is passed from person to person until the whole building was flooded with light.

This evening your lighted candle will burn as a token of your prayers joined to the constant prayer of the whole Church of God and those you love who are in God's nearer presence.

The Bible tells us that Jesus came as a light shining in the darkness. As we experience dark times in our lives this ancient symbolism of light signifies for us the victory which Christ won for us on the cross: light out of darkness: life over death.

There is a prayer of which I am particularly fond. It says this

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise
that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home.
Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory.¹

Jesus calls to us through the darkness and the grief, in the familiar and the mundane of everyday living, when our resources are low, when we are shrouded in despair.
When we are unable to see our way, Jesus comes to us. Even in the darkness he is there, waiting for us to recognise his loving comfort.

I would like to finish with some words I came across not long after my husband died. Sorry I am afraid I don't know the source.

I said "God I hurt." And God said "I know."
I said, "I cry a lot," and God said "That'd why I gave you tears."
I said "God, I'm so depressed," And God said "That's why I gave you sunshine."
I said "God, life is hard," And God said "That's why I gave you loved ones."
I said, "My loved one died," And God said "so did mine."
I said "God it's such a loss." And God said "I saw mine nailed to a cross."
I said, "God, but your one lives," and God said "so does yours."
I said, "God where are they now?" And God said "Mine is on my right, and yours is in the light."
I said, "God it hurts," and God said "I know."

¹ Common Worship ©Church House Publishing 2000