

Sunday 28th October 2018
Commemoration of the Faithful Departed

Liverpool Parish Church

NT: I Peter 1.3-9
W H Auden: Stop all the Clocks
G: John 5.19-25

For some of you this has been a most difficult year. The death of someone you love can only be a source of great pain. It doesn't matter how old they were. It doesn't matter if their death was expected or sudden. It doesn't matter if death came as a release from a painful illness or was a tragic accident. The death of someone you love can only be a source of great pain. As clergy, we can be here to support you, to listen, to help with practical matters. We can walk alongside you but we cannot walk in your shoes of grief.

There is an old graveyard that sits on the edge of the Menai Straits in Anglesey which is a place of great peace. There in such a beautiful setting the dead bring comfort to the living. There the dead remind us that we should treasure this life and not let it pass in a bustle of business without time for reflection and cherishing what is truly precious.

It was in this cemetery that I found the grave of Private Robert Jones from the Royal Welsh Fusiliers who was killed in action in September 1917 aged just 18 years old. His family had written the following inscription:

Only those who have lost are able to tell

The grief for one we loved so well

As clergy, we can walk alongside you but we cannot walk in your shoes of grief. The loss of someone you love dearly sends you on a journey you have no choice but to undertake. At first, each step is a painful struggle beneath the crushing blow of loss but gradually very gradually you learn to move further down the road. There will be times when unexpectedly the smell of perfume, a piece of music, a familiar face lights up a memory and the way ahead feels all uphill again.

There is a light of hope that I can offer – well two really. The first is that God walks with you in your pain. Do you remember that poster that used to be so popular with the poem ‘Footprints in the Sand’? The person in the poem saw the footprints of God walking alongside them through life but bemoaned the fact that when life was at its most difficult for them, then suddenly there was only one set of footprints. But God had not abandoned the person, rather at that point the footprints were God’s as he carried the person through their sorrow. So always trust that God walks with you. The Father who sacrificed his only Son so that all might live. The Son who was willing to die for love of each one of us. The Holy Spirit who took that sacrifice and through the power of love conquered death forever in the glory of the Resurrection. Nobody knows more about death than God and his grace ensures that death can never have the final victory.

Which is my second light of hope for you. As we heard in the gospel the Father raises the dead and gives them life. We hold to this promise of eternal life. We believe that those who have died live now in the glory of the light of God. If the Father was willing to sacrifice his son, and Jesus that son was willing to undergo the suffering and death of the crucifixion, then how can we doubt that the Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead will also raise all humanity. God would

not have gone to all that trouble for nothing. Death is not the end but a new beginning. A birth into a life that we cannot even begin to imagine. A life of love without pain or sorrow, a life of light without a shadow of darkness, a life where the knowledge of the glory of God is made visible in the face of Jesus Christ.

May this promise of comfort for yourselves and peace for those whom you love be a strength to you as you journey on so that you can sing the words of our Offertory hymn with hope.

When the shadow of death fell upon them, we sorrowed, But now we rejoice that they rest in the Lord.

Amen.

The Revd Michelle Montrose