

**Sunday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020**  
**Second Sunday after Trinity (A)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**[OT: Jeremiah 20.7-13]**  
**[NT: Romans 6.1b-11]**  
**G: Matthew 10.24-39**

‘Tis better to have loved and lost

Than never to have loved at all.’

We have, I’m sure, all had cause to reflect on loss recently: the loss of freedoms, small and large, that we hitherto took for granted; the loss of company and companionship; the loss of employment and pastimes; the loss of a sense of normality and certainty; the loss of gathered church community and public worship; the loss of touch and physical connection with many of those we love; and, of course, for many, the loss of loved ones and, in some cases, the loss of an opportunity to say goodbye properly. But, within our losses, maybe we have all found things too, maybe new things, or old things that we’d almost forgotten but which now seem new; if nothing else, I think we have all found out just how much we value those things that we have lost.

‘Tis better to have loved and lost

Than never to have loved at all.’

These famous lines of poetry are taken from the poem *In Memoriam A. H. H.* by Tennyson, written in memory of Arthur Henry Hallam, one of Tennyson’s closest friends from his days at the University of Cambridge, but who had died suddenly aged 22 in 1833; that Tennyson didn’t complete this poem until 1849 indicates how much this friendship meant to the poet

– but perhaps it also demonstrates how long the pain of loss can linger, and how our past can loom large in our present, and hang over our future. I have had cause to reflect on things of the past, present and future recently: as you may know, this is my last Sunday as a member of the community at Liverpool Parish Church, and although the Rector has assured me – or warned me – that, in some sense, I will never leave (in fact, his exact words were: ‘you’ll never really escape!’), all things must pass, and it is time for things to move on. But the Rector is correct – of course: my time at St Nick’s will always live with me, the experiences, the people, the community of St Nick’s, will always be some part of who I am, and though I have to say goodbye, and although there is sadness and loss in this, I will be forever grateful to have been part of this special place, and for the love I have experienced.

“Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all.’

But, like Orpheus in the underworld, it is probably better to not look back – or, at least, not too much, as tempting as it is. And I think that our gospel reading today speaks into this: ‘Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.’ (Matt. 10.39) Jesus’ words make clear the necessity of loss, that loss is part of life – indeed, it is seemingly a necessary part of salvation, of the journey to eternal life: God sacrifices Godself on the cross – and we must die that death with Jesus to rise to new life in Jesus. But what does this mean for us, now, in the midst of our loss? Perhaps it is a call to a greater awareness of vulnerability – our own, yes, but, more importantly, the vulnerability of tens of millions of people all around the world who, through the iniquities of injustice and inequality live constantly in loss and vulnerability, similar to that which we have experienced in the past few months, but much worse, subject to disease, social ostracization, chronic

uncertainty, a struggle for resources, food, water, sanitation, education, living in the ever present shadow of death. And if our hearts have been opened by our own experiences of loss and vulnerability recently, once it is over, perhaps we will be moved not to try to escape from this back into our myths of comfort and invulnerability, but to be more willing to enter into the truth of our collective vulnerability: this public health crisis has demonstrated our radical dependence upon God – and in the times of social crisis that will follow, perhaps we might be more willing to accept loss ourselves and, like Jesus, help to bear the burdens of others, to be alongside people in our shared vulnerability.

But Jesus' words are also words of hope and freedom: 'Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.' (Matt. 10.39) To take up the cross and follow Jesus is not necessarily a call to martyrdom – although for many Christians around the world living their faith does come at the cost of their lives – but to take hold of the cross means letting go of whatever it is we are already holding, whatever burdens we are carrying – it can be understood as a call to let go of those things that we think define us – things like the past, our individual and collective past – and things like our sin – the things that we cling to because, for better or worse, that is where we think our identity lies – and it is a call to give all of this to Jesus, who will carry those burdens that we cannot bear, who will help us to let go of those things which hold us back, and who frees us to move forward, to find our true identity not in our past, but in our future, in Jesus, in the freedom of God's Kingdom.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Louis Johnson