Sunday 1 November 2026 **Liverpool Parish Church**
All Souls Requiem

OT: Wisdom 3.1-9
G: John 6.37–40

Those of us gathered this evening to remember would, I imagine, like me, rather not be here, rather not have our loved ones' names spoken. We are not here out of choice; rather, we are here because we share a common bond, because our lives have been changed for ever by the death of someone we loved. In that moment of their death, we became the bereaved. For some, the death of a loved one might have happened recently; for others, quite some years ago, their passing still a painful, raw memory or an ache that long ago we learnt to live with.

Though we would rather not have to do this, we come here this evening to remember, before God and with each other, the lives of people that we loved. As their names are heard aloud, we remember those people whom we have loved and whom we mourn: sons or daughters, brothers or sisters, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives.

In a few moments each one of those people we remember will be named and in naming them, we who mourn them will remember the life journey that we shared with them and how our lives are richer because of what they meant to us.

Remembering them in the public way that we do today is a bittersweet moment. It's good that we hear their names spoken in a public place; it's good that the names of those we love are spoken because, in the act of speaking their names, we acknowledge them and all that we shared with them. But it is also difficult because we remember, as well, the pain of the loss, the blackness of our grief, the utter devastation that came with their death and the painful steps that we have had to take as we learn to live again.

Wisdom speaks into that bittersweet moment, setting the apparent finality of death alongside the hope that the righteous remain safe in God's care, at peace with him. That does not make the empty place at our table any less real or tell us that we should no longer weep. It invites us to trust that what we can see of death is not the whole story. We feel the pain of separation; yet we may entrust those we love to a God whose care reaches beyond our sight. The path of grief, though, is a lonely path because each of us who travels on it has to tread it alone. Although many share the journey with us, no one else knows those dark places our journey takes us to, or how painful each step is as we learn to live with the different realities of our lives without the ones we love.

My own grief journey began one sunny spring morning in 1996 when I received a telephone call at work to say that my eldest son David, who was nearly 11, had collapsed in the school playground. I managed to get to the school in time to travel with him to Alder Hey, where he died later that morning. The rest of that day and the days immediately following became a blur as the realisation of David's death filled my life. For me, though, it was often the small things that were the hardest to cope with, those normal everyday things that our lives are so full of. For me, it was the empty space at the dining table, the empty seat in the car as our perfect family of four became three. Now, as I look back over my journey, which started on that spring morning in 1996, I see the steps that I have taken, and each of them I will remember as David's name is read out shortly.

The hardest part of grieving for me was answering the question of why my son died. Why was that young boy, who had so much of life to live, born with a congenital heart defect, a defect that I learnt years later I had passed to him through some strange defective gene?

Each of us will have asked that question, I am certain: why did it happen? Why did the person we love have to die? I railed against God for many years because he had let my son die. Why hadn't he stepped in when I had prayed to him? Surely, it would have been the simplest of things for God to do, to have changed that one gene that had caused David's heart muscle to be too thick. A God who had created him could surely have cured him if he cared.

Those thoughts and others like them kept me away from God and away from worshipping him for many years, as I journeyed through my grief.

In those early years following David's death, I struggled even to go inside a church. A place that had meant so much to me as I grew up was a place that caused me so much pain. A place that once was full of light and hope had become a place that was only full of dark memories. Yet that is not now true for me. I stand again in a place of light and hope, amazed by the awesome grace of God and assured of his promises to each one of us.

The Gospel we have heard, from John, gives that hope a voice in Jesus himself. He promises to welcome those who come to him, not to turn them away. For those of us who have struggled to pray, or who have brought anger and unanswered questions to God, that welcome matters. We do not have to hide our grief before we come to Christ. His welcome is where we can bring it.

Jesus connects this promise with the will of the Father who sent him: he is to keep those entrusted to him and raise them to life on the last day. These words do not explain why David died, or why any of us must endure the loss of someone we love. They offer a different kind of answer: death will not have the final word. The hope of eternal life rests on Christ's promise, not on our ability to make sense of everything that has happened.

It was when I understood this, in that moment of realisation and understanding, that David's death made sense to me. It was at that moment that I realised that I wasn't travelling the path of grief alone, that I was being carried by a loving God. In that moment of acceptance, my grief was lifted. I can't say that it has gone completely. I know I will never be the same person I was before David died. I still have days when I wonder: what if? What would David be like now? But the darkness of grief that clouded my life for many years was lifted from me in the moment that I was able to claim God's promise for myself. I knew with certainty that, at every step I had taken on the path of grief, I was not alone. God had taken every step with me.

In a few moments, the names of those we love who have died will be read out. As the name of your loved one is spoken, call to mind the love that you had for them and they had for you, the love that you shared together whilst they lived, the love that still binds you together with them. As you call that love to mind, remember the happy things that you shared together, the lives that you shared together and all that they meant to you.
As we hear those names, we can hold both readings together. Wisdom looks towards a life of faithfulness and love in God's presence, sustained by his grace and mercy; John directs our hope towards Christ's welcome and his promise of resurrection.

Tonight we do not have to force ourselves to feel something we cannot yet feel. We can simply bring our memories, our tears and our love, and entrust those whose names we speak to God's keeping.

Remember with thanks the loving God who knows the pain of loss, the pain of seeing his only Son die, and who wants now, to make his dwelling place, his home, within you, and to wipe all your tears away.

Fr Bill Addy