**In Loving Memory Address 2022**

It doesn’t take much to be reminded of a loved one. For our homes are full of their presence – photographs certainly, but also personal belongings from trinkets to furniture. Perhaps we use their cutlery on special occasions, admire an inherited picture that now hangs on our wall not theirs, listen to the chiming of their clocks.

If they lived with us, or close to us, we are forever travelling their paths, passing their favourite shops, cafes, views. Our roads remain theirs. And if we travel further afield, we can find ourselves unexpectedly re-visiting shared destinations, holidays, perhaps even, the communities where we once lived. With courage we might stand outside our favourite pub or even a former home.

Such is their impact on us, there is little that can distract us from remembering with a constancy that sometimes others, not so bereaved, fail to grasp. As we are asked, ‘are you OK?’ we find ourselves carrying the innocence of that enquiry with a grace that hides our inner wretchedness.

The truth is, we’re not OK, and here today, in this sacred space, be assured that no pretence is needed. Come as you are. May we have the courage to weep and allow our tears to express the fullness of our love.

This service cannot make everything right again for me or for you. But knowing we are in the company of those who understand our grief, for we too grieve, may help a little on your journey.

That one-way journey into our new future – for there is no going back – is not so much about healing as about acceptance: acceptance of the loss we’re experiencing, acceptance that the future will always be different.

God grasps all this, for in being born as a human being, Jesus, God became exposed to all the human frailties and realities that we know so well.

One story shows this most vividly. Jesus had a close friend, Lazarus, who died. The bible tells us how Jesus was distraught at the news, and shared in the grief of Lazarus’ sisters, Mary and Martha. He was as wracked with the pain of loss as any of us.

In this story we have a most human encounter with Jesus, whose divinity, his godliness, didn’t obscure his humanity but enriched it. As we grieve, may we remember that God in Jesus, grieved too. May the godliness that is in us, support and sustain us as we journey on.

The bible passage I’ve just read may have been read at your loved one’s funeral. It gives us a beautiful description of the nature of love and the very high standards to which we are called to live love throughout our lives.

But the passage also gives us – in language that is poetry, mystery and metaphor all rolled into one – the promise that we will, one day, in God’s time and place, fully understand ourselves, one another, and God.

Here is a vision of a universe re-united in love as our Creator God intended, with all the pain, limitations and human shortcomings of life set aside.

It is a vision of hope that has love, reconciliation, acceptance at its heart.

For now, our task, rooted in love, is to remember. And we do so by reading the names of those we love and lighting candles in their memory. Should, through some error on our part, your loved one’s name not be read today let me know please immediately after the service and we will, before you leave this church, gather around the altar to pray for them and for you.