

Pastoral Letter – November 2020

From The Rev'd Paula Griffiths

Dear friends

Winter is coming. T S Eliot wrote in *Murder in the Cathedral* that '....golden October declined into sombre November....' Dark nights, short days, and depressing weather can make the passing of time seem very poignant.



For centuries the church has associated November with Remembrance. Even before 11 November became a day of national commemoration for those killed in war since 1914, the memory of the saints who have gone before us – All Saints' Day – and our own loved ones who have died – All Souls' Day – have marked the Christian calendar. Modern Hallow'een tries to make light of it, with broomsticks and pumpkins and fake skeletons, but these days remind us that death and mourning are inescapably part of the human condition: a tunnel that we all must face alone. Yet Jesus, by accepting human death and conquering it for ever through his resurrection, transformed death's darkness into the hope and promise of life eternal.

Even knowing that hope, we feel natural grief at no longer seeing our loved ones. It is right to take space and time to pause, reflect, and mourn - while giving thanks for lives well lived. Sometimes we mourn for lives scarred by pain or illness, or for lives which for whatever reason could not fulfil their potential. Jesus, opening his arms wide for us on the cross, holds that sadness, as he offers the fullness of life without pain in his kingdom.

This year, we recall other communal tragedies too. We know so much about the First World War – umpteen books and websites describing battles, cemeteries, photographs, medals, and countless stories from families on all sides of the conflict – yet know so little by comparison about the Spanish flu epidemic which followed. Despite its worldwide spread, it is now little more than a footnote in the history books: yet it killed some 50 million people.

Now we too are living through a pandemic. COVID has made 2020 the strangest year many of us have ever known: the unseen enemy insinuating its tentacles into our work, our social life, our family get-togethers and our worship. We mourn the many thousands dead; stand in compassion with those who have contracted the virus and who may be scarred by it for months; pray for safety and healing for ourselves and our loved ones: and ache for a way of life where the virus is defeated.

Yet we have hope. Jesus, weeping at the death of beloved Lazarus, shares our sorrow and loss: but promises his future. Jesus, dying like us, meets us in the Easter resurrection garden, calling us by name. As we mourn and remember, with thanks and with love, may we hold fast to that knowledge that neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, nor COVID-19, nor anything else in all creation, can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord; and hold to the promise of Revelation that death, crying and pain shall be no more in God's new heaven and new earth.

With my love and prayers,

Paula

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