

The Vine at Home
All Saints Day – Year B
31st October 2021

Preparing yourself

This week it's All Saints Day on Sunday, a day when we celebrate all who have come before, all who have shaped our journey of faith, all who have left us with their wisdom, their testimony, their hope.

We stand on the shoulders of giants, and we worship with a great cloud of witnesses. So, wherever you are reading or hearing this today, why not prepare yourself for worship and reflection by thinking about some of the heroes in your story – perhaps someone you knew when you were younger, or someone you have always looked up to.

You might like to write their names down or, if it helps you, draw them.

Hymn / Song: 28 STF – Jesus calls us here to meet him

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvBGtFPd6TQ>

(You could listen to the song whilst doing the activity above).

Prayer exercise

Sit down, close your eyes and breathe 3 deep, slow breaths.

Keeping your eyes closed - pay attention to your breath for a minute or more and in doing so, when you breathe in, imagine you are breathing in the love of God.

When you open your eyes look around you, what do you notice in the room around you that reminds you of the love of God?

If this is something you can hold, hold it, if it is to be looked at, look at it. As you do so, remember that you are in the presence of God.

When you are ready, offer this time of worship to God: “around me and within me, Spirit of God I thank you for your presence here. I offer each breath in worship to you. Amen.”¹

If it helps you, why not say the Lord's Prayer in a version or language that you are comfortable with.

Here is the traditional Lord's Prayer in English:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who
trespass against us.

¹ Opening prayers written by Alison Ransome

And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory,
for ever and ever. Amen

Here is a Bible reading for today: John 11:32-44

³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, “See how he loved him!” ³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, “Take away the stone.” Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, “Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days.” ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.” ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

Reflections on the reading

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In some ways, the last 18 or 19 months have been defined by death. Our generation has lived through its first pandemic and – at the time of writing – Covid-19 has an official global death toll of over 4.5 million people, with over a thousand more people being added to that number every day.

Like all societies, we’ve learned to adapt and survive...but we cannot turn away from the fact there has been so much death. And, of course, if you knew any one of those 4.5 million people, you didn’t experience that death as a statistic, you knew the personal pain and grief that comes with saying goodbye. As is quoted in the Richard Curtis film, *About Time*: ‘like most families, we learned to live with life after death’. We are all going to have to do that – again.

What about today’s All Saints Day gospel reading – what do you make of this passage? Is it a helpful one for you?

In this story, of the death of his friend Lazarus, we see Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. Human in the sense of his grief – that grief we can relate to, the grief of being human

and knowing we will have to say goodbye to those we love at some point. Divine in that, in the frustration and pain of grief, he cannot help but use all his faith and pray to his Father for a miracle of resurrection, and then everything we would all hope for in this situation happens. By some miracle, the person they are grieving for, the man about whom so many people gathered that day would have been saying: 'if only I had chance to see him again', 'I'd have liked to have told him one last time that I loved him', 'I wish I'd had chance to apologise for that argument we had'...all the regrets and wishes of the grieving. By some miracle, those wishes all come true – and out strolls Lazarus.

Jesus, too, struggles with death. Jesus weeps too. Jesus feels the pain of grieving for a friend. So, when you feel that pain, that grief, Jesus is right there with you. You are not suffering alone, and God travels with us in our pain. The divine is somehow present with us, even in this year of so much death.

This resurrection narrative, and the later one of Jesus' own resurrection, leave us with the knowledge, the hope, the faith that death cannot control us. That the fear of death is not the only force at work in this world. That worst thing is never the last thing. 'See, I am making all things new'

Let's cling to a hope in new life, in new possibility, in resurrection. Even though we walk through the valley of the shadow of Coronavirus, we will fear no evil, for our God and our shepherd is right there beside us, knowing our pain, never diminishing our suffering, but always pointing us towards the light.

As Leonard Cohen put it: 'There is a crack in everything, that's how the light gets in.'

What about you, what brings you hope?

Spend some time thinking about where your hope comes from, and maybe ask some of the people in your life what their answer to this question might be. It's a great conversation-starter!

Let us pray.

Lord God, you know us, just as we are, and you know everything about us.

As we open ourselves up to your Spirit, in your name, this day, show us how to love, how to hope, how to grieve, how to weep, and how to travel this road together.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Come, Holy Spirit.

Come, Creator God.

Amen.

Blessing

God is with you, and God is before you,

As you rise from this space, may the grace of God be known in your hearts, your minds and the way you connect with all creation. Amen.²

² Additional prayers by Tim Baker

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