

## All Souls Homily 2021. Revd Nicki Bullivant.

We are here this evening because we have all experienced the searing pain of loss and grief when someone that we love dies. When we lose a loved one it can feel as though part of ourselves has died with them. We know in our heads that death is inevitable, but nothing can prepare us for the depth of pain and loss that we feel in our hearts. Every loss brings its own unique kind of grieving: whether it is for someone young or old: someone in the prime of life, or someone who has suffered a long and difficult decline. We may be grieving a partner, a parent, a child, a lifelong friend. Whatever our story it is significant to us. We know how hard it is to try and re-engage with life, when there is an emptiness within, like a raw wound.

In our reading from Lamentations, we are taken on a journey, a journey from death to new life, from suffering and pain to hope and healing. At the start of the journey Jeremiah names and acknowledges his raw emotions and the stark reality of the heartache and pain that he is feeling as he cries out to God 'My soul is deprived of peace: I have forgotten what happiness is.' These are words that may well have often been on our lips too. We may feel confused, angry, alone, numb, overwhelmed or even abandoned by God, and like Jeremiah we may direct our anguished cries and pain to him. These verses show us that we can come to God with our honest feelings. We don't have to sanitize our emotions or put on a fake smile for God, and likewise we don't have to turn and run away from him when we are angry and upset, we can and should be real with him.

As Jeremiah journeys through grief, he begins to trust again that God is indeed, 'kind and merciful.' Can we like Jeremiah dare to hope once again in 'the steadfast love of the Lord which is from everlasting to everlasting.'? From my own personal experience of bereavement and loss, the answer is yes, but it takes time.

Jeremiah cries out, 'my soul is downcast within me YET this I call to mind and therefore I have hope because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail, they are new every morning.' Here is the turning

point amid suffering. Not a magic wand to make the heartache and pain disappear, to make everything instantly better again, but a fresh, strong hope on which to build, a hope that we can cling to while still in the darkness. Each day in small but significant ways hope comes to us, God's compassion and comfort reaches out to us.

Someone once said that real grief does not come at the time of death but in the days, weeks, months and perhaps years that follow. We, like Jeremiah, may feel that we are on a journey, a journey from grief to hope, a journey that is disorientating, a journey a bit like snakes and ladders, just when you feel like you are getting somewhere, you find yourself back at the start again. Journeying through grief is never easy but it has been particularly difficult during the past 18 months. We haven't been able to mourn together, remember together, laugh and cry together.

Some of us gathered here today are still journeying through the valley of the shadow of death, from where we are standing the valley is long, dark, and deep. The valley is real, and the shadow is here. But this doesn't mean that we are without hope. What is the one thing necessary for a shadow to exist?..... Light. There can be now shadow without light. The shadow is not the ultimate reality, rather it is proof that the light is also there.

So it is with God: he is our light, our consolation, and our companion through all the ups and downs of life. God promises to never leave us or forsake us, we may feel that we are not able to hold onto him, we may even doubt that he is even there at all, but he is Immanuel, God with us, he holds onto us and promises never to let us go. He doesn't abandon us in life, and he won't abandon us in death either. Through the love and mercy of God in Christ Jesus there is hope of resurrection and life with God, both in this world and the next and I pray with all my heart that this hope will be yours today and always. Amen.