

A Sermon for All Souls Service, Sunday 3rd November 2019

Readings: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 and Romans 8. 31- end

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven”

We're in November, and in the church this is the time for remembering. This morning we remembered the Saints whose faithful lives have helped us to follow Christ better. Next Sunday, with poppies pinned on our chest, we will remember those who have died in war and conflict. In between we might, with brightly coloured bunting above our heads, remember remember the fifth of November...

Tonight then, we gather to remember all those who have died.

We remember those whom we have loved and who have died.

And we also remember those that we found hard to love and who have died.

And those we feel guilty about not loving enough that have died...

And those whose lack of love in life, still causes us pain now they have died...

Tonight, we bravely gather and acknowledge, before God, all our memories of those who have died. It is a time to remember.

However, that season of remembering, might be different for each of us gathered here tonight.

For some, those for whom a loved one has died over the past year, this All Souls service will be particularly poignant, as might your first Christmas without them, or the anniversary of their death.

For others, whose losses were perhaps many years ago, this service might be part of an annual remembering.

I don't know what season you are in tonight...

I don't know whether, for you, it is 'a time to tear down', in grief or anger at your loss.

Or a 'time to build' a new life; not moving on from grief and loss, but growing around it.

I don't know whether you are in a time for weeping or a time for laughing; if you are in a time of mourning or of dancing; if you are in a time of silence about your grief or a time of speaking into it.

You may be in a time of embracing, holding those around you close as you share a common loss...

Or you may be in a time when you refrain from embracing, pushing all those who love you away from you. Wondering if anyone could understand how you feel.

You may be in a good place with God, knowing your loved one is safe in God's embrace; or you may be bitterly angry with God for taking your loved one from you.

I don't know that time you are in.

But I do know that there is a time everything... A time for all feelings under the sun. A season for each emotion that grief and loss puts in our way.

This is a time to remember and not forget.

Today is a time to hear the names of our loved ones read out, and to light a candle and to give thanks for all that they gave to us in life.

A time to remember those who have died, and pray for them and pray for ourselves in our remembering.

A time to gather together to remember, because we know that when we remember those who have died before God, there is a place for all our multitude of conflicting emotions.

We heard in our letter of Paul to the Romans;

"I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord"

Paul writes these words to a congregation who are trying to follow in the footsteps of Christ's love, during a time of much difficulty and suffering. And he reminds them that nothing can separate them from the fullness of that love of God.

This was the good news that Paul reminded the church then.

And it continues to be good news to us now.

Good news, that as we pray for the souls of the faithfully departed, God, in God's faithfulness, has already fulfilled that which we pray for.

Good news that God has gathered up the souls of all those we loved, and all those we found hard to love, into the fullness of God's transcendent love, and that there is a place prepared for us too, when that season arrives.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven. And so today, as we sit in a season of remembering, remember too that good news. Remember that nothing can separate you from God's love and know that that is also true for all those you hold on your heart and remember tonight.