

**Memorial Service Sermon by Rev Jane Kraft
St Michael's Church, Sandhurst on Pentecost Sunday
19th May 2024**

Readings: Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33,
Romans 8:31b-35,38-39

“The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases his mercies never come to an end” (Lamentations 3:22)

The church year has a rhythm which helps us to remember the significant events in the Christian story. It begins with Advent and four weeks of preparation for the celebrations at Christmas as we remember Jesus born as a baby in Bethlehem. This moves on to Lent as we spend six weeks in solemn preparation for remembering the events of Good Friday and the rejoicing of the resurrection on Easter Day, ten days ago we remembered the moment Jesus returned to the heaven and the glory which was His before the world began.

The Ascension was essential because, as Jesus made clear, his departure would not leave his disciples bereft but would lead them to a new form of his presence among them.

For some time, Jesus had been telling his disciples that he was going away. They had experienced the grief and devastation of parting from Him in death at his crucifixion and they had delight with joyous elation in the reunion at His resurrection appearances but now gently he withdrew from their sight. Today is the Feast of Pentecost when we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit the comforter and guide that new form of Christ's presence which he promised. Through all of this the steadfast love of God runs like a golden thread a reminder that, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life."

This evening as we gather for this memorial service you will each have memories of those you love but see no longer.

For some of you the loss is very recent, the grief is still raw and excruciatingly painful. For some, as time has passed it has become a familiar companion a persistent dull ache which never quite goes away but catches you with a sharp intensity, just when you are least expecting it, yet, there are times when the memories of your loved ones make you smile or even laugh out loud.

We often speak of being torn apart by grief. And it does feel just like that. It is important to grieve, to express the loss, to acknowledge the pain and the loneliness. But it is also important to remember, to bring back together in the present all that the person still is to us. We need to remember lest we forget the difference they made to us, the influence they had on us and what, through their living and dying they have given to us.

Memory is a strange phenomenon. Something very trivial or seemingly unconnected can prompt a whole host of memories to come flooding back. Things long since forgotten, happy times, painful experiences; people, and places.

I went out to lunch the other day with some friends. We had first met at the hospital where we trained as nurses together, back in the early 1960s, and later we had worked together as night sisters. We shared a lot of experiences and have a lot of collective memories. As lunch progressed and we had caught up on our respective families and present lives we found ourselves almost imperceptibly slipping into reminiscences of the past. It cannot be denied those years of learning, working, and living together as part of a specific community had a huge

influence on our lives and the people we have each become.

Grief has the tendency to cause us to turn in on ourselves away from the everyday things; from the normality which grates with our present experience that life will never be “normal” again.

And with those emotions it is often hard to see the love of God. But love is something which continues. We don't stop loving someone when they die, it is love which remains the link between us and them.

And it is the connection with God's faithful and steadfast love which links and binds us to those we love and have lost.

Love spans that chasm which separates life in this world with that continuing existence in the nearer presence of God.

The love, which we experience in this life, is a dim reflection of the wonder of the eternal love of God.

We experience it in a small way in this life through his creation and in the love we have for one another. We learn about it through God's loving redemption of humanity. The love, which sent His son Jesus, to die on

the cross and rise again on that first Easter Day, so that all who believe in him might have eternal life.

We have just remembered those events of Good Friday and the devastation of Jesus' mother and his disciples as they watched his crucifixion and witnessed his burial. As the account moves on, we remember and celebrate his resurrection on that first Easter Day and his return to the Father at the ascension. But Jesus didn't leave them or us to cope alone with the trials and tribulations of this world he sent his Holy Spirit to comfort, sustain, guide, and empower us as we live the good news that by his death and resurrection Jesus God's son conquered death and brought us flawed human back into a right relationship with God and so opened for us the gift of eternal life.

God is always with us - through Christ's cross and resurrection he is with us to pardon, and forgive; He is with us through the Holy Spirit's indwelling, to guide, strengthen and empower us.

“with us in sickness and in health,
with us in life and in death
with us in time and in eternity.” *J C Ryle*

As our second reading reminded us that nothing can separate us from the love of God.

This evening, we come to remember. We come to give thanks for all those people, whose lives touched ours.

We come to recall what they have given us in the time we spent together with them and to be reassured that that can never be taken away.

We remember so that what they have given us is not wasted.

And we come to ask for God's help to build on the inheritance we have received.

So may we know the abundant love of God which unites us with those we love but see no longer and pray that that they and we may grow deeper into that love for all eternity.