

## **Sermon for the Commemoration Service Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021 Given by James**

During the last couple of years have you found yourself saying at any time “I don’t know how much more of this I can take”. Or, “It’s just one thing after another at the moment – when is all this going to end”? I have thoughts like this. I think we all do. None of us are alone in these difficult and anxious times.

I don’t know of any one thing that is more difficult, or more desperately sad than losing someone we are close to, someone we love with every part of our being. Whether older or younger; whether there’s been illness and you’ve expected a life to end, or whether death is sudden and unexpected, grief is real, grief goes deep, grief is always life changing. I think grieving becomes part of who we are, it doesn’t go away. All being well though, we learn to live with it, and we carry on living. What other choice do we have than to live?

At the beginning of 2020 I was taken by surprise, and I daresay you were too. Over the years we’d been warned of threats by diseases like Avian Flu and SARS. And although they were real in some parts of the world, by and large, the viruses passed us by and here in Great Britain we were unaffected.

Then we began to hear reports of Coronavirus in China. It very sounded very scary – but it was a long, long way from our shores. Thousands of miles away. But the voices of western scientists were getting louder. Then I remember hearing with horror that people in the affected region of China were being told not to leave their homes, on pain of imprisonment – or worse. Huh, that’s a totalitarian regime for you, thought I.... Later we heard of the first cases in Europe, and then some simply horrendous stories from Italy about the sheer numbers of those who were ill and dying. And then Covid 19 came here, and everything changed.

Often when I am supporting grieving people and their families, I talk with them, and at the funeral about love, and how real love comes into its own at times of loss and tragedy. At the same time, I acknowledge the raw and real pain of grief. So often a widow, or widower, a son or a daughter, a mother or a father will say “I didn’t realise how many people cared about me. I’m overwhelmed. Love comes into its own, God comes into his own.

When COVID 19 became a reality, neighbours began looking out for each other in ways they hadn’t done before. Love and concern became real and tangible. Families got in touch more and kept in touch more. I conversed with my brother and sister more in the last couple of years than I have since we were young and lived in the same house with our mum and dad. We are close we get on well but we hadn’t really needed each other so much before.

The church responded too, it responded to real need across the country, helping desperate people through foodbanks, shelters and debt relief. And through simple, but vital, loving care.

During the lockdowns, in particular, many of us found we had more time. Time to be still, time to appreciate what is around us, and time to appreciate one another. So

many people re-assessed their lives and values. None of this is to diminish the awful pain, loss, and grief many of us have experienced. Some have lost jobs, many are worse off financially, and perhaps none of us feel as sure and secure about life and our future as we did before. Before grief, before the pandemic – or simply before.

The writer of Psalm 91 wanted to remind his congregation of just who God is and how he can be trusted, and how their lives would leave behind fear, anxiety and dread if only they turn to him.

*If you say, “the Lord is my refuge” and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.*

And later, in the same psalm, the voice of God himself

*“Because they love me, I will rescue them, I will protect them for they acknowledge my name – I will be with them in trouble, I will deliver them and honour them”*

The words of Jesus himself are recorded in Matthew 5:1-10. His words are words of promise. They are words that give us a picture of what we will be like, and what life will be like as God’s kingdom becomes more and more real to us and in the world.

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.  
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted”*

You will be comforted by him – the Lord of heaven and earth.