

**All Souls' 2018**

**Hebrews 11: 32 – 12: 2**

This evening we are keeping All Souls' Tide or commemorating the souls of the faithful departed. Some people will be attending this service in response to an invitation because either Christine or Jean or I have taken the funeral of a loved one in the course of the last year. Some people will have made a special effort to attend this evening to remember before God somebody special to you who died perhaps many years ago. And some people would have been at the Priory's evening service in any event and are now being prompted to think of those whose memories you treasure.

And as we do so, the Bible tells us that we're surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. It's as if the people whom we're remembering are with us as we worship. It's been said that people never really die. I think that in some ways that is true; but in some ways

it isn't. It isn't true in the sense that one of the challenges of bereavement is coming to terms with the fact that someone has, indeed, really died. I'm sure there will be people here who still find themselves expecting their loved one to be coming home; or who hear something and think "I must remember to tell them that, when they come in" . . . only to remember that, of course, they won't be coming in.

There is a point in a funeral service at which hand over our loved one to God. We steel ourselves and, however much grief it may cause us, we let go and allow God to receive our loved one from us, trusting that he can do for them what no-one in this world could do; no matter how much we loved them. But it takes a lot of coming to terms with.

On the other hand, though, as we worship here tonight we are, indeed, surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. All the people for whom we are making an act of memorial are here, with us, tonight. And, at

least in that sense, they are not really dead. Or, to put it another way: this is a place where they can come alive for us.

God inhabits eternity. And it is to be with him in that eternity that we surrender our loved ones at the funeral service. But, when we join our voices in worshipping God, eternity intersects with the world in which we live. So, as we worship, all time and every time is present.

As we worship, God is present, offering an encounter with him to each and every one of us. He is here now, knocking on the door of everyone's heart; and asking to be invited in to provide comfort, support and hope. Of course, that requires a response from us: we have to be prepared to open those doors of our hearts to allow him in. Some of us will be reluctant to do so: too stubborn, too proud, too self-reliant; or perhaps too hurt, too numb, too raw. But to anyone who has the courage to make room for God, he offers strength

and purpose. And as we encounter God, we are assisted to keep alive the memories of our loved ones and the influences that we treasure.

The community that worships regularly here at the Priory can help make those encounters with God and with the living memories of our loved ones real. There are people on duty here this evening who are available to pray with anyone who would like to receive personal prayer. After we have made our acts of memorial by lighting a candle and placing it (or perhaps them) on the altar rail, you may like to go through to the chapel which is just the other side of those screens, or you may like to make your way there after the service finishes. People will be there to pray with you.

We also recognise, at the Priory, that Christmas can be an especially difficult time for people living with the grief of bereavement. That can be particularly so when it's the first Christmas you had to spend without somebody, but it's not necessarily limited to the first

The Revd Matthew Pollard, Rector of Bridlington Priory

one. It may well be the unrelenting razzmatazz and cheerfulness of Christmas, the full-on partying and celebrating just isn't where you're at; and you're dreading it. So, here at the Priory on Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> December, that's the Saturday before Christmas, we're going to have a service at 4.00pm like this one. It's called Comfort and Peace and Christmas. It will be quiet, it will be reflective and it will be designed precisely for folk who just can't cope with Christmas.

But the Priory doesn't just make one-off, never-to-be-repeated offers. The encounter with God through a personal relationship with Jesus is what is preached here week in, week out; and it's what people of faith experience as they gather and break open God's Word together and break bread together as Jesus told us to do in remembrance of him.

At our loved one's funerals we let go of them so that they could be released from this world to the fullness of a life with God. But you don't have to wait until

death for that life with God to begin and, through that life, to feel still connected with the people whose lives we commemorate this evening.

Amen.