

## **2008 Memorial Service**

*John 11.17-27*

### **Welcome**

Again, welcome to everyone here, and especially to those who have made long journeys. After the service, do please feel free to stay and chat if you would like too; and there will a drink available in the hall across the road.

### **The Light of Christ**

Tonight we are holding before God our departed loved ones; we are giving thanks for them and for all we shared with them, and we are praying for them before God. In a few minutes we will read their names out. We will invite you light a tea-light while we read the names of the departed, taking the flame from the big candle at the front. You can help us by passing the flame to the person next to you or behind you.

The flame is to remind us of our Christian hope, and as the names are read out, I hope you will ponder this. The candle at the front is a symbol of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead – let the flame that *you* hold that is lit from it, speak to you about the hope of eternal life for those whom you have come to remember today. As we pray for the departed, let the flame help you pray that, that in Jesus Christ, your departed loved-one may rest in peace and rise in glory.

### **Our Christian Hope**

How do we know this Christian hope? Let me revisit with you tonight's second reading, which we have just heard. It is the account from St John's gospel of the raising of Lazarus from the dead. Lazarus, together with his sisters Mary and Martha, were three of Jesus' closest friends. Lazarus falls ill and his Martha and Mary send word to Jesus to come quickly. But before Jesus arrives, Lazarus has died; when the sisters come out to tell him the sad news, which Jesus already knows, he says to them: *Your brother will rise again*. Martha thinks that Jesus is speaking about the resurrection of the dead at the last day, but he goes on to say to her:

*I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?*

Mary responds with some great words of faith:

*Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.*

And then Jesus goes on to perform the great miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead.

This service tonight invites us, in a way, to put ourselves in the place of Mary, and to hear those words of Jesus as if they were spoken to you personally. *I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die*. Lazarus was raised from the dead; so too was Jesus not long after, after he had gone to the cross of Calvary for the salvation of the world. Above all, it is the raising of Jesus himself from the dead on that first Easter Sunday that assures us of what our Christian hope is: that we all may rise through faith in him to the eternal life and light of heaven.

## ***Taking Hold***

For many of you, this will be a bittersweet time. You will have both love and heartache within you, as you think back and remember . I hope these words of hope and promise from Jesus will be for you like a flame of light in the dark. Some of you will be further along the road of ‘coming to terms’ than others. And as you have no doubt found out by now, grief is a journey with many ups and downs and no short-cuts. You may have discovered that different people grieve in different ways and at different speeds. Within families, you need to understand that about each other, and be very patient. Above all, talk, listen, shed tears when you need to, and one day the memories that are tender now will bring laughter to your lips.

But it may also be the case that this service stirs things up for you more than you expect! If so, there are some other words of Jesus that I would like to put in front of you. He says:

*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger; whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

In grief, in sorrow, in all kinds of upset, I find those words immensely consoling. The words remind us that we do not have to walk the journey of grief alone; Jesus is there if we turn to him to sustain us on the journey: *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, whoever believes in me shall never thirst.* At some time, the road of bereavement comes to an end, and there is peace. We come to know a kind of resurrection even in this life, a resurrection our feelings; we may find that we are laughing at the same memories that made us weep just a few months ago. I pray the joy of the Easter hope will shine in your life too, as a spiritual blessing from God. May we all come, at the last, both those we pray for tonight, and ourselves mourners, to that place of joy and light and laughter, that place where sorrow and suffering and grief and darkness is all put away and healed, that place that is so full of God’s presence and joy – all that we mean by the word heaven.

And as we go out from Church tonight, let us be refreshed in spirit by the Lord, who says to us,

*I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger; whoever believes in me shall never thirst.*

God bless you.