

ALL SOULS' 2022

Readings: Philippians 2.1-18

Luke 14.25-33

That is a difficult Gospel to read out in tonight's context; it reads a bit like bumping into this very cross Jesus laying down the foundations for joining up or enrolling as a new disciple and, if I am perfectly honest – I would run a mile if this was the only occasion of encounter with Our Lord; I certainly wouldn't want to give up all my possessions to follow someone whose CV was somewhat unreliable and whose mental state seemed as uncertain as James Bond on his next secret mission!

Fortunately we have many other texts and over many centuries, interpreted and digested which give us a much fuller and rounded picture of the Christian story of sacrifice and redemption, the story of death and resurrection, the pilgrimage we all follow from each Good Friday to each Easter. This story is actually not one of oppression or fear but instead, one of faith and hope.

And tonight, in particular, is our private as well as public time to remember and give thanks for our loved ones who have died – through prayer, sacrament, and later in this service, lighting our own candles at the high altar. It is a simple act of faith and love to say how much we miss those closest to us and how much we hope and pray their light lives on in the company of all the heavenly host of angels and saints.

At a recent funeral I took, I heard these well-known words again, by Charles Henry Brent:

“What is dying? I am standing on the sea shore. A ship sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her till at last she fades on the horizon, and someone at my side says, ‘She is gone.’ Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all; she is just as large in the masts, hull and spars as she was when I saw her, and just as able to bear her load of living freight to its destination. The diminished size and total loss of sight is in me, not in her; and just at the moment when someone at my side says, ‘She is gone,’ there are others who are watching her coming, and others take up a glad shout, ‘There she comes’ – and that is dying.”

In a sailing community such as Woodbridge that short meditation feels all the more powerful. Like many of you, I regularly walk past the shipbuilder’s yard overlooking the Deben, observing their busyness and skilfulness, preparing, repairing, restoring so many different boats and ships, their comings and goings.

We all have different ways of remembering and letting go; sometimes our grieving seems relentless and our emotions so wide-ranging. How important it is to keep talking to one another about those feelings and being as honest and as open as we possibly can.

And how important it is to seek out and discover whenever we can, God’s promise of comfort and real presence through

Christ's living Church. As tonight's first reading warns us, we sometimes mess up, and we often grumble when perhaps we should be kinder and more thoughtful each to the other. A Church, every church, should be a place of refuge certainly, but it should also be a place of solidarity and unity, knowing the promises of Christ are creative, healing and life-changing as well as true. To follow the cross is to choose a path which leads us finally to the empty tomb or, the sea's horizon, where earth touches heaven – and we are invited in to share the eternal banquet and see the God who made us, face to face, for the first time.

“Grant, O Lord, that we may live in thy fear, die in thy favour, rest in thy peace, rise in thy power, reign in thy glory; for the sake of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” (*William Laud*)

Amen.