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## **ALL SAINTS B**

3rd November 2024

A short act of worship and daily devotions

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## The Vine at Home

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024 (All Saints Sunday – Year B)

### Opening Prayers

God is everywhere  
In this space and all spaces  
In this time and all times.

God is waiting to meet you and is ready to welcome you  
Just as it has been for all eternity  
So be still.

*Pause*

Get ready to notice the spirit working:  
Through words on the page  
Through sounds around you  
Through familiar and unfamiliar smells  
Through all that you see when you look up from what you are reading  
Through the touch of your hands as you hold them together to pray.

So be still.

*Pause*

If you feel able, speak aloud the following words:

God of all time and space I notice you here. I am ready. Amen.

**You may now wish to say the Lord's Prayer in a version or translation with which you are familiar**

**Readings:** John 11:32-44 – [Click for reading](#)

### Reflections on the reading

At the end of The Lord of the Rings, Gandalf says to the hobbits: 'I will not say do not weep, for not all tears are an evil.'

Today, including in our gospel reading, there are tears, and perhaps today is a day for recognising the need to cry... People vary in how much or how often they shed tears – some of us rarely get through a day without the need for a tissue, for others, only the most painful or tragic happenings cause tears to flow. Today, as we celebrate the season of All Saints, is a day when emotion may be close to the surface, and that's okay.

Marking 1st November as All Saints Day began sometime in the 9th Century, so it is a very long-established part of the annual Christian calendar, but even before then days and dates had been set aside to remember those who had died in the faith – saints and martyrs, known and unknown. It remains a special season, connecting with our mixed emotions of thankfulness and sorrow – celebrating those people who have cheered us along the way, yet often still mourning their loss.

Jesus is our image of God incarnate – a God of love, made human. What God will one day do for all humanity, Jesus comes and does for particular human beings at a particular time – a sign and foretaste of what is to come. So Jesus gathers with friends at a time of mourning and he too begins to weep. This is a very well-known verse in the bible, in some translations it is just two words, ‘Jesus wept’, making it the shortest verse. It is also an extremely significant verse, demonstrating the full humanity of Jesus who enters into the emotional range of human life and knows what it is to grieve and to cry. Let’s not forget that when we find we can’t hold back the tears. As we noted with that quote from Gandalf: there is no shame in needing to express our grief in this way.

Elsewhere in Scripture, we read about visions of the future, of a heaven where we are told that one day all weeping will end, which is good news, but may not do much to address our present feelings of grief in this life. We all have reason to be sorrowful – we have all known the death of a friend or family member, we all look at the news and feel grief for the suffering of the innocent in war, through famine and disease, through human greed and exploitation. Why should we believe that one day tears will be wiped away and sorrow ended?

And in this incredible gospel story, we see another foretaste of this time to come – this time where death will no longer be final. Something which is prophesied by Isaiah is explored by the Revelation of John - another book written in a time of oppression, persecution and despair - and is enfleshed by Jesus who gives us the downpayment in raising Lazarus to life. God means business about destroying death. What that means for me and for you, with our own personal griefs and sorrows, it’s hard to say. Will we see our loved ones again? Or will it be better than that? We don’t know and can’t guess.

There is one more thing we do know, however, one more common feature in these three passages, and perhaps this is the one to which we have to cling in 2024 in the midst of all the sorrows and questions of our life now. There has to be a waiting time.

If you have time today, read the whole of John chapter 11 and notice how the tension is built up, with waiting time a very real part of the story. Having heard that Lazarus is ill, Jesus does not rush to Bethany, where they lived, but waits two days (v6). Why? When he does get there (v17) he finds that Lazarus has already been in the tomb for four days, and Martha later points out that there will be a stench for that very reason. Martha comes out to meet Jesus and says, ‘If you had been here, my brother would not have died’ (v21). When Mary meets Jesus, in today’s passage, she says the same words, ‘If you had been here, my brother would not have died’. The implication is clear from both sisters, Jesus could have arrived earlier, he could have prevented Lazarus’s death and the four days of weeping, mourning and heartbreak which Mary and Martha have experienced could have been avoided. But it wasn’t. They had to wait, they had to suffer first. Why?

It’s quite a hard question to answer, and maybe it’s not the right question to ask. Maybe we simply have to say, ‘That was how it happened, Jesus was some distance away, he was doing things he had to do, he didn’t arrive until four days after the death’. All that is true, but perhaps we can also read into this something else which might help us deal with our own lives in the here and now. The final fulfilment of God’s destruction of death is still in the future and so we have to endure the waiting time. Yes, the resurrection of Christ, even more than the raising of Lazarus, has sealed the deal, has shown God’s hand, has demonstrated God’s power over death, but it remains just a foretaste...for now.

So, although in this season of All Saints we may and should shed tears for the pain of heartbreak we know in our lives, missing those we love, we can believe that the pain we feel will one day come to an end. If you can...just sit quietly for a few moments and allow your own emotions to come to the surface... Pray about how you feel, and if you need to cry, that’s okay.

Some questions to consider and reflect on this week. If you have an opportunity to meet up with someone you trust, perhaps you could discuss your responses with them, and ask them some of these questions too:

Do you agree that knowing that pain will come to an end makes it easier to bear? Do you have experience of this?

How do you respond to the saying: 'It will be all right in the end, and if it's not all right, it's not the end'.

How can your home, your community, or your church (if applicable) be a place 'where tears are understood'?

### **Responding in prayer**

I take a moment today, at the start of November, as autumn begins to turn darker, wetter, colder, to pray for all who are overwhelmed by grief:

- Grief for loved ones who have died...
- Grief for the harsh realities of living with war, famine, oppression, exploitation...
- Grief for family and friends living with pain and distress...

God of all comfort, draw near in Christ to all who weep. Wipe away their tears, assure them of your presence, give courage for the next step... Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

God of all compassion, draw near in Christ to all who wish things were different. Show them your heart of sorrow and speak to them your words of healing and restoration... Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

I pray today for all who work in places of death and despair:

- For medical staff dealing daily with the stench and heartbreak of death...
- For counsellors seeking to accompany people on difficult journeys...
- For the Samaritans, listening to those who have lost their way in life...

God of all understanding, draw near in Christ to all who seek to offer hope and purpose. Stand by them as they face the abyss and point them towards the glory which is to come... Lord in your mercy, hear my prayer.

And I take a moment to give thanks today for all who have gone before and showed me the way:

- For the saints whose lives inspire me to persevere in the journey, step by step...
- For my loved ones who showed me something of your nature in their lives...
- For those whose witness and sacrifice built this community that I call home...

God of all time, you hold in your hands the lives of all who have lived, the lives of all who will live, and my own life. Lord in your mercy, help me to be an answer to prayer.

Amen.

### **Responding in music**

123 STF – Come, thou fount of every blessing - [YouTube](#)

503 STF – Love divine all loves excelling - [YouTube](#)

## **Blessing**

Lord Jesus Christ,

Thank you for being a God of justice, love and mercy. I ask that you help me to live after your example, to be a model for those around me.

Holy Spirit, fill me anew, that I might have the words to speak of your love, and that I would demonstrate that love through my actions.

Amen.

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## **Prayers and Prayer Pointers**

### **Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November**

- On this day in 2008, Barack Obama became the President of the USA.
- Today we pray for all world leaders, whether we agree with their politics or not. We pray for grace, for wisdom, for the courage to lead and to discern the best way forward for our planet and the people who live in it.
- God of all grace, show us how we can support those most in need in our world, through our political systems and by engaging in democracy. Amen.

### **Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> November**

- It's Bonfire Night today in the UK, and perhaps you are hearing fireworks going off as you read this, or making plans to attend or host a party of some sort over the weekend.
- As you listen to or see a firework, think about the explosive nature of these little bits of cardboard and gunpowder, which can be seen for miles around. Perhaps they are like your faith – it may seem small and relatively insignificant, but it can light up the sky and be a source of encouragement and wonder for others.
- Pray about how you can be a firework for others this weekend, and in the weeks ahead.

### **Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November**

- Go outdoors and find something natural: a stone, leaf, flower, or something else.
- Consider the ways God has made this thing and then reflect on how you too are wonderfully made by God.
- What does this mean to you?

### **Thursday 7th November**

- Gracious God, show me how to love without borders or restrictions, how to radically live out your calling on my life and your challenge to all of us to live in the way of love.
- Show me how to be the kind of shepherd who would always go in search of the one most in need, how to reach out to the lost sheep in my life and community.
- Show me how to love as you love, O Christ.

### **Friday 8th November**

- The German theologian Meister Eckhart once said, 'if the only prayer you ever say in your life is "thank you", that will be enough'.
- Today, throughout the day (or whatever is left of the day), simply look for opportunities to pray the words 'thank you' to God.
- Thank you for the sunrise. Thank you that I have enough food for the day. Thank you for my health, such as it is. Thank you for that lovely conversation with a friend. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Amen.

### **Saturday 9th November**

- Find a moment today, to just be still.
- Listen for the still, small voice of the divine.
- Don't try to force it, don't worry if you hear nothing, or you just hear your own thoughts. Just hold the space, and still your mind, heart and soul.
- Pray about anything that comes up...