

Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> October

Baby Loss service

Psalm 139

There was an English mystic in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century called Julian of Norwich – she had a number of revelations from God and wrote them down in a book called Revelations of Divine Love. One of the most famous was one which concerned a tiny hazel nut. As she pondered the tiny nut in her hand she felt God saying to her that ***all things have their beginning by the love of God***. She looked further at the tiny hazel nut and saw 3 truths. ***The first that God made it. The second that God loves it. And the third that God keeps it.***

This afternoon each of you has come here to St James Church to remember. I am sure it hasn't been easy. It can't be because the remembering you are doing today is remembering a child you loved who is no longer with you. And you're probably not certain how you will react. I am sure that it is an act of courage that you are here at all. Not quite knowing what to expect – or how the service might affect you.

This afternoon may bring back feelings of pain and sorrow, but I hope also it will bring some kind of joy as you remember, and comfort and hope too as you look to the future.

Perhaps one reason you have come here today is that what you have been through is so hard to talk about. Friends and family are caught up in their own lives, with their own challenges. Perhaps you see them with children of their own, and the very fact they have their own makes it hard to talk about the children you have lost. I hope today will give you an opportunity to talk if you wish.

Maybe you are also here because you are looking for answers. Why? Why me? What have I done? All I can say is that there are no easy answers – and anyone who pretends there are easy answers is simply leading you astray.

Maybe you are asking "where is God in all this?". What I can say is that God is here. In all of this. In the midst of it. In the middle of the mess of life and of death. Shedding tears along with you; sharing your grief and sadness. Walking alongside you through the pain. Perhaps carrying you through the pain.

Maybe you're here because you want to know how long these feelings of loss will last. There is no easy answer to that either. No-one can turn to you in your grief and sadness and say "I know how you feel"; no-one can tell you that the feelings you have are right or wrong or how long they will be as they are. Only you know how you feel. Or perhaps even you are not quite sure how you feel. It changes so often, and is so unpredictable.

I would love to be able to stand here this afternoon and tell you that it is all going to get better, but I'm not sure I can honestly say that because it won't necessarily. It will get to be different. It will not always be like it is now. The rawness will slowly go; the intensity of the pain will lessen. The bad days will get less bad and less frequent. But for each of us that change will be different – in both its effect and its timescale.

There will always be some kind of absence. The feelings of absence will certainly change over time, but they won't go away. So let's not try to kid ourselves or give ourselves false hope. We **will** learn to live with those feelings, and life can and should be good again. But in a different way. Different but still good.

In a few minutes in this short service we will light a candle for those we remember and place that candle on the altar here in church. I hope and pray that a simple act like that will help you.

But why candles? Why does lighting a candle for someone help us at these times?

The large Easter candle that we have alight is the one we lit last Easter Sunday as we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. A candle, a light, because Jesus describes himself as the Light of the World – able to bring light to dark situations; able to guide us through the despair; and able to help bring us to the place where we can see a future again.

We light candles for our loved ones today in the hope that they live on in the presence and light of God. In the hope that their lights continue to shine; continue to light up our lives even though they are no longer physically with us. This hope is not merely wishful thinking; it is certain hope – a bit like when we plant bulbs in the autumn in the hope of the coming spring – we know that spring **will** come. I hope in a similar way you can know your children are in God's presence.

This hope about our children is effectively the same as the hope contained in those words of Julian of Norwich with which we started. Perhaps we can paraphrase them as we think of our children. God made them, God loves them and God keeps them.

Maybe you'd like to say those words yourselves, this time not using 'them' but using your child's name. God Made; God loves, God keeps.

This is the same message that we heard in that Psalm – that God made us and knows us and will always be with us.

God doesn't promise to take the pain away; he never promises a life free from suffering or sorrow; but God does promise to be alongside us, wherever we are, whatever we do and however we feel. Always there to support us, protect us and take us by the hand as we slowly move to the future.