

Annual memorial service All Souls' Day 2008

Revd Mary Bide

When life hurts, sometimes we stand as though nursing a wound – holding ourselves with tight arms, hunched forward, as if trying to protect ourself from further hurt.

Grief can feel like a physical pain. And the pain radiates outwards, piercing the souls of those who care, who long with all their hearts to be able to make it better, take away the suffering.

The pain isolates too, cuts us off from each other, because no one knows what to say. I suspect many of you have experienced that – people who seem to have avoided you or who will never mention the one person you miss and would like to talk about. It is not because they don't care, simply that they cannot enter into your grief. And it doesn't always get easier with time. Of course, some things are easier, because you are used to the sense of loss. But one of the hardest things about losing someone you love, is that everyone around you moves on. Yes they grieved, but now they expect you to have got over it, but for you life will never ever be the same again.

Deep in our hearts though, we know that the one we miss does not want us to grieve forever. He or she wants us to live fully, to be happy. Is that possible?

When Jesus was dying, he was in pain and surrounded by grief.

Into this pain, Jesus gives a command. Not a suggestion, or advice, but a command. A command born out of compassion, but urgent, short, compulsive.

Near him, watching, distraught with grief, were his mother and his best friend, known in the gospels as the disciple Jesus loved.

To his mother he said: 'Woman, behold your son.' To his best friend: 'Son, behold your mother.'

Those few words said so much.

Do not use your arms to hug your grief to you, but open your arms in love to another that is hurt.

Even from the cross, even from the depths of his own pain, Jesus' ministry continued. All his teaching had been about love. And at this point, on the cross, his love is still radiating outwards. Mary and the beloved disciple are to extend their love for him into

love for each other. And as they open their arms to each other they will expose their vulnerability just as a hedgehog might when it uncurls. And in that position, as the pierced soul lies open to the world, the healing touch of love can begin to restore life.

So we come to church today, to remember. It is here that we sit at the foot of the cross, in contemplation. Actually it is where we are whenever we feel the impotence of another's grief, whenever we feel the aching loss of our own grief. It is a place where we have to be. But we cannot stay there for ever. We must be moved to respond, in active love. To open our arms to receive the love of others who are hurt, and to love them in return. It is in living and loving, we honour the one we love who has died. Amen.