

Sermons at the Anglican Church of Luxembourg

Preached by Rev. Geoff Read on All Saints Sunday 2018

Hebrews 12:1-2

In the Celtic Christian tradition, they sometime talk about “thin places”

Those places where the membrane between time and eternity, heaven and earth seem almost imperceptible

Often places of prayer, pilgrimage, devotion I think there are also times in the year that are thin too

And All Souls and All Saints is one such time

For some, loss and grief are still so fresh and the memory of a loved one is a constant companion

For others, as time goes on, the distinctiveness and detailed features of a person’s face starts to fade and with that their constant accompaniment in daily life

All Souls and All Saints is a time when the memories of loved ones who have died are invited from the background to the foreground of our lives through ritual and fond and thankful remembering

So, if you are here to remember by hearing your loved one’s name read out – welcome!

The writer of our second Bible reading offers us particular encouragement in our remembering

It’s the encouragement of faith, what earlier they have described as “assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things unseen.” (11:1)

To believe that what seems so real and solid in the things of this life – time and space, pension plans and houses, jobs and relationships – is not all there is

But equally, what seems so real and solid in the things of death – breath ceasing, a funeral, an empty place – is not all there is

Faith is the choice to hope otherwise

It’s the choice to pause from the busyness and distractions of now to and become aware of “more”

The writer to the Hebrews has spent a whole chapter reminding his readers of the long list of those in the Bible, the Jewish people and the early Church who chose to live by faith, taking hold of the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen

This is the “great cloud of witnesses” by which we are surrounded – those who lived by faith then and who live in the presence of “more” now, who have stepped by faith through death, between time and eternity, earth and heaven, who have finished the race of life in this world and now enjoy the delights of the next

The image is of them as a crowd in a stadium cheering on those who are still running that race in the here and now

READ 12:1

We run, at times weighed down by different things:

- some come to us unbidden - grief, loneliness
- some we foolishly pick up, thinking they will help, but they end up clinging to us

But run we will

The knowledge of the cheer of loved ones is encouragement indeed

But even more significant is this

READ 1b-2

It's in Jesus that we find the one who is pioneer and perfecter

Pioneer – the one who makes free the path

Perfecter – the one who gives us strength when our faith is flagging

And note how he is described – not as God, Christ, Lord

But simply Jesus, his thin, earthly name

The name that reminds us that he understands the pain of loss, the moments of desolation, the temptation to “if-onlys”

The One who bids us hear the cheers, dust ourselves down and run again day by day