**All Souls 2023**

I miss you.

I miss you. 3 small words which we utter so often in the face of bereavement. I miss you, I miss him, I miss her, I miss them, I miss you. In the first days and weeks of grief, we say to people, ‘I will miss them’, the grief not quite having become real yet, all the events that we thought we’d experience together are contained in that word ‘will’, I will miss you, because you are now missing from my life.

But there is another unspoken meaning behind the words I miss you. When someone we love dies, it can feel like a part of us dies with them, we can miss ourselves too. No matter how much we might know intellectually that the love we shared will remain forever... emotionally and physically, we feel this loss. Death changes who we are, it sometimes even changes our status - from spouse to widow, from child to orphan, and there is no getting around that, no matter how much we may wish things to be different. So when we say, ‘I miss you’, we are also saying, I miss being your wife, your husband, your child, your friend, your grandchild, your parent. I miss the way I loved you, and the way you chose to love me back. I miss the way I laughed with you, I miss being known by you, I miss the me I was when you were alive. When I say I miss you, I mean it, I miss everything that you were in life, but I also miss myself. I miss being your wife, your husband, your child, your friend, your grandchild, your parent. I miss you, and I miss me too.

Grief is destabilising, even if the death is expected, even though we believe that Christ has conquered death and we believe in the resurrection and life eternal. Love never dies, but it does change, and we change too. Part of the tenderness and power of tonight’s service comes from hearing your loved one’s name spoken out loud again, in a church full of people, all who have come together this night to remember, to acknowledge who is missing from our life. In a moment, you will hear the name of your loved ones in this holy space, and you will hear the pause and silence between the names too. In that pause, we hold not just their names, but also those words, I miss you, I miss myself.

In that pause we remember that we aren’t promised a life free from pain, from grief, from sorrow, from tragedy, from mourning. But what we are promised is a God who loves us through the pain and grief, who has the name of each one of us and of those who have died inscribed on the palm of his hand. We remember that even as we say, ‘I miss you’, God replies, I know, and I will be there for you as you miss them and as you miss who you once were, and I will be there as you find yourself once more. God who says to us, I love you, and as you miss those who have died, know that love remains even after death, because love is stronger than death. Know that love keeps you united to all those you miss and long to see once more. Know that as you say, ‘I miss you’, love keeps us hoping, keeps us together, keeps us healing as we live. Love flickers in the candles surrounding us tonight, that will flicker in the candle you are shortly to light for your loved one, each light shining brightly, a flame that says ‘I miss you, and I love you, now and always.’

Amen.