

SERMON

Given that this whole sermon series is about our desire to enter the deeper dimensions of being a praying people, the focus of today is not me talking **about** prayer... it's about all of us having the opportunity and space for different expressions of prayer and time for deep reflection.

Down the centuries and across the world, Christians have celebrated both All Saints and All Souls' Day to contemplate 3 important strands of our faith/life journey. And it really does give us an opportunity all too rare in today's world.

Firstly, it gives us a sacred opportunity to commemorate all the faithful departed who are dear to us. We have had many from our own community (past and present) who have passed on, so today we can reflect on an important truth.

When our loved ones pass from this world to the next, they are not 'separate' from us, because in Christ, who conquered death, the two worlds are One. As St Paul so profoundly reminded us... **there is nothing in life nor death, in all creation, that can separate us from the Love of God in Jesus Christ.**

And it's this profound truth that can empower all of us onto a healthy communion with those departed because they're not dead ghosts ... they are alive in the Risen Christ

Secondly, today gives us a sacred opportunity to reflect not only on the meaning of death, but crucially how our faith gives us the gift of seeing how every aspect of who we are and experience is woven into an eternal perspective. Death does not have the final word. So your life and my life and all those who have touched our lives are all caught up in this eternal hope. I find this deeply, deeply, meaningful.

Which brings us to the third aspect of what we contemplate and commemorate today.

We not only remember our own loved ones who have passed, we also remember that we are part of the world-wide body of Christ and ALL the faithful departed who are now the great cloud of witnesses. We are in a holy union with **all** of God's people (past, present and future) because we are **all** in a Holy Communion with Jesus Christ. The Risen Christ is the connective tissue between the earthly and heavenly realm. And Jesus Christ is here with us all today.



Again, I find this deeply meaningful that the faithful souls who have departed this earthly realm are people who gave their lives to follow Jesus Christ. All of them in their own way (however imperfectly) recognised in the life, the teachings and the death of Jesus Christ, a more beautiful vision of a more beautiful world that we know in our hearts is possible. A kingdom vision that can heal this broken, hurting world.

At the very wellspring of this beautiful vision is the Beatitudes, which biblical scholars rightly call the essence of the essence of Jesus teachings. The Beatitudes are Jesus' vision for HOW His Church on earth, can be the heavenly salt and light of the Kingdom Way and Truth.

So today, as well as praying and remembering our precious loved ones, we can also pray for all the souls who mourn... that they will be comforted.

We can pray for the soul of humanity to realize our deep need for God.

We can pray for hearts and minds to hunger and thirst for all that is just.

To hunger and thirst for the ways of mercy over revenge.

And above all, for a time such as this, let us pray for the Way of Peace in all its many expressions. Of all the Kingdom qualities so needed for our world it's the quality of God's peace.

Think about our journey through life. What is it that can most elude us all and what we do we most yearn for? It's to know peace in our souls.

When people pass on what do we say? May they rest in peace.

And what's at the heart of all the self-inflicted conflict and suffering in our world throughout history? It's been our failure to live in peace with each other.

And as we commemorate all the souls, I do want to pause and acknowledge all those who may have lost a loved one to suicide. The struggle for those who take their own life is complex and manifold, but at the heart of things is a tormented soul unable to cope. Today we pray in the name of Christ that they are now resting peace with their Creator Maker. And for all those struggling to come to terms with a loss of a loved one to suicide, may you too, know God's deep healing and peace.

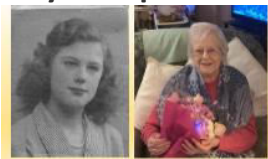
So as we spend time today in prayer, remembrance, reflection and the lighting of candles, keep the heavenly wisdom of Jesus at the heart of all our prayer expressions. ***"My peace I leave you, my peace I give you"***.

To begin to conclude, and to help us enter this time together, let me offer a few words of guidance.

If you've brought a photo or symbolic item, feel free to remember your loved one in any way that works for you. You may wish to just sit and hold and pray.

You may wish to do this and to bring the item or photo and place it on the tables that are by the candles and light a candle. There are also pieces of paper and pens if it feels helpful to write a prayer. If you haven't brought a photo or symbolic item, spend the time in whatever way is most helpful for you, at this time.

To take us up to this sacred time, here's my own personal offerings for this day.



Firstly, I'm going to pray and light a candle to remember my Mum who passed on December 18th last Christmas. Two pictures that speak a thousand words about the precious gift of life. Aged 17 and one year before she passed.

For all of us in the Jones family/whanau, mum is remembered as a beautiful soul who aspired to be a peacemaker. She was the glue that held everyone together. She listened, encouraged, got alongside, and made everyone feel special included and loved. She was a peaceful presence.

But I also know that my Mum had her own struggles to know inner peace after a traumatic childhood. Her father was often drunk and often violent. The family home was a place of conflict. Through her adult life Mum had to travel her own deep journey to a place of peace. So I will also be giving thanks for the fact that in her own journey she managed to find healing from a place of hurting.

This may resonate for you today. Family relationships are complex. We can both love and feel hurt from those we care for. For whatever reason you may be here today and still carrying unresolved hurt and grief. Maybe for you today, this can also be a time of prayer for reconciliation, healing and peace for your own soul.

I believe that what helped Mum to find her peace, was that she lived the wisdom of Jesus and his brother James. She *'planted seeds of peace'* in the lives of others. Because to give is to receive.

I will give thanks that Mum is now resting in peace with her Creator Maker and that I still share a living connection through the unbreakable bonds of love, known into eternity. As you do with your loved ones.

As I pray for my own mother, I'll be praying for the mothers in ALL the war-torn places of our world grieving for their lost children. I'll pray for all the children deprived of the tender love and care of their mothers. All at the hands of violence.

As well as remembering a departed soul who is a precious loved one or a mentor, maybe you could also commemorate the life of someone in history that has spoken into our Kingdom story. Someone whos' inspired you in your faith. It's a way to commemorate our divine union in Christ with all those departed.

As I thought about a soul from history there were many that sprung to mind but then in prayer, I heard the words... *'remember, remember the 5th of November'*, As an English kid I grew up of course with Guy Fawkes and bonfire night etched into my cultural psyche, but since I've come to Aotearoa N Z it's taken on another significance.



Today I will be commemorating these two departed souls. Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi. Why these two men?

On Nov 5th 1879, as 1600 British troops invaded the western Taranaki settlement of Parihaka to confiscate Māori land, these two men practiced the way of the Beatitudes. In a show of non-violent resistance to all that was unjust, they attempted to be peacemakers and reconcilers. And as Jesus warned, they were persecuted.

So today, I will remember them as a way of remembering all those in our current world situation who are in some way attempting to sow the seeds of peace. I know from listening to the many conversations in the Middle East that there are good people from both sides (Jews and Palestinians) who are being harshly criticised for daring to speak the language of peace and reconciliation. I want to light a candle for the light of Christ to shine in the darkness of escalating violence.

Which inspiring soul from history might you want to commemorate?

Today, in all our prayers, reflections and remembrances, and for all the souls who have touched our lives, let the beautiful words of James be at the very heart of our shared time together.

17 The wisdom from the heavenly realm is peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and the fruit of good deeds. It shows no favouritism and is always sincere.

18 And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness and justice.

SLIDE FOR GUIDANCE

- Bring your symbolic item and place on a table.
- Say or write your prayers and light a candle.
- Pray for your departed loved one to rest in peace.
- Pray for your own soul to know inner peace.
- Remember a departed soul from history who has inspired you.
- Pray for our world and for those who risk much to be the blessed peacemakers.