Sermon delivered by

The Reverend Nicky Latham

All Souls Day

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May the Lord be in our hearts and on my lips, that I may proclaim the Gospel worthily and well, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**.

Sometimes grief catches us when we least expect it. We hear a song on spotify, or come across an old photograph. Something funny happens, and we think, "I must tell them about that." And then we remember. They're not here anymore.

You may know that feeling. It can happen even after many years. Grief doesn't follow a timetable, and a sudden wave of sadness doesn't mean we're going backwards. It reminds us how much someone meant to us.

So today, as we gather for All Souls, we come just as we are. We remember people we've loved and people we miss. And we may remember a relationship that wasn't easy, conversations left unfinished, or things we wish we'd said.

Whatever you've brought with you today: sadness, gratitude, regret, or a bit of everything you're welcome here. There's no right way to feel. And you don't have to put on a brave face.

And here, with all that we're carrying, we hear these words of Jesus:

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

These are tender words, but they may puzzle us. We usually think of blessing as good health, security, or happiness. How can someone carrying the pain of loss be called blessed?

The Jewish New Testament Scholar Dr Amy-Jill Levine helps us hear the Beatitudes within the Jewish Scriptures and traditions that helped shape the community Jesus lived in. His promise of comfort echoes Isaiah: good news for the oppressed, healing for the broken-hearted, and comfort for those who mourn.

Jesus is not saying that grief is good or asking us to be grateful for suffering. He is telling us that suffering does not put us beyond God's love. Even when life feels fragile, we are not forgotten.

When someone is grieving, we often struggle to know what to say. We reach for familiar words: "Everything happens for a reason." "God has a plan." "They have gone to a better place."

These words comfort some people. For others, they leave painful questions. We can listen gently, without expecting everyone to find comfort in the same way.

Sometimes we need not an explanation, but someone willing to stay beside us. Someone who will listen to our stories, say the name of the person we miss, or simply sit with us in silence.

Faith leaves room for tears, questions, and days when we have little strength. We do not have to explain our loss to belong to God. The promise is not that we will never grieve, but that God's compassion reaches us here, in our grief.

Levine also reminds us that blessing carries responsibility. That need not become another burden for grieving hearts. It can be a gentle invitation to care for one another when ready.

Today we light candles, speak names, and offer prayers. We give thanks for lives that touched our own. These things matter. In time, remembrance may also help us notice how those lives still shape us.

If it feels right, bring someone to mind. Perhaps they showed you kindness, taught you something important, or helped you feel loved. Perhaps their difficult life taught you about resilience or the need for compassion.

What remains of their life within yours? It may be a way of seeing the world, a commitment to justice, or the memory of being welcomed when you needed it most.

When we are ready, that love may find expression in small acts of care. A kindness offered to someone lonely. A generous gesture. A step towards justice for someone whose dignity has been overlooked.

There is no timetable for this, and no task we must complete to prove our love. Sometimes receiving help is all we can manage. That, too, belongs within a community of compassion.

The Beatitudes offer comfort and invite us to share it. The love we have received can, gently and in time, become care for others.

But not every memory is happy, and not every relationship is loving. Some remain painful after death, carrying conversations that never happened, apologies never offered, or reconciliation that was not possible.

There is room here for those memories too. Faith does not ask us to pretend we were not hurt, or to hurry towards forgiveness. We can remember someone with love and still acknowledge the pain they caused. We can grieve what we lost, and what we never had.

We can bring these unfinished stories to God without tidying them up first. God's mercy reaches into our regrets, misunderstandings, and broken relationships.

Peace need not mean every question is answered. Sometimes it begins with being heard, knowing our pain matters, or accepting support. We can take that slowly. We do not have to find our way alone.

The compassion we see in Jesus invites us to hope for healing without denying what happened. We can entrust those we remember to a love greater than our own: a love that understands their whole lives, their joys and sorrows, their generosity and failures.

We need not pretend to understand everything about eternity. Today we can rest in hope, grounded in the conviction that love is at the heart of God. Even our unfinished stories can be held within that love.

So today, perhaps we can hear the Beatitudes with new ears.

Blessed are those who mourn.

Not because grief is good, but because it does not diminish our worth or place us beyond God's love.

Blessed are the meek.

A human life is not measured by power or achievement. Quiet kindness matters. So does the love nobody else ever saw.

Blessed are the merciful.

Compassion helps us recognise one another's dignity, even in our imperfection. We need that gentleness for ourselves as well as for others.

Blessed are the peacemakers.

The world needs people willing to make room for justice, kindness, and love. Sometimes that begins simply with staying beside someone who is hurting.

Here grief and hope can meet. Not because sadness disappears, but because love continues to shape us. Those who have gone before us remain part of our story.

Today we remember. We give thanks. We grieve. We hope. And we entrust those we love to God, whose compassion is deeper than our understanding.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

May we receive that comfort in whatever small ways it comes. May we offer it through patient listening and kindness. And may the love we remember gently sustain us tomorrow.

Amen.