



DIOCESE OF
GLOUCESTER

**REMEMBERING
WITH
THANKSGIVING
THOSE WHO
HAVE DIED**

**Resources for services of remembrance and
thanksgiving for those who have died**

REMEMBERING WITH THANKSGIVING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

Many churches of all traditions now regularly hold services to which they invite those who have been bereaved. This may be around All Saints/All Souls tide or at other times of year. The Mission Initiatives Group in the Diocese realized that this was a significant time when we make contact with those on the fringes of the church and suggested providing some resources to support. It is important that such services are ones which we carry out in the best way that we are able.

This pack aims to resource such occasions. It contains a useful **introduction** with some guidelines, produced by the Revd Andrew Axon, based on experience in Hucclecote, and **resources** gathered by Brian Parfitt.

There are **two outline orders of service** which can be adapted. One is a little more formal, based largely on the suggestions in 'The Promise of his Glory' and the other a slightly less formal service.

There are ideas of various ways an **act of remembrance** can take place, **lists of possible hymns, songs and other music, as well as some suggested readings and Psalms** and a selection of **prayers** is included from which you can draw your own material.

There are also **four possible examples of themes** which could be followed. Each has a set of readings with an introduction to them. This could either act as a prompt to whoever is preaching, or could be read when there is no preacher present, as sometimes happens in our rural groups of churches where each church holds its own service. There is a linked prayer and suggestions for the music.

Material in this resource is drawn from a variety of sources, including contributions from clergy in the Diocese and published/web-site resources, from which you can draw more ideas. They include:

'Common Worship: Pastoral Services', ©The Archbishop's Council, found on the Church of England web-site - <http://www.churchofengland.org/media/1174624/cw%20pastoral%20services%20funeral%20web.pdf>

'The Promise of His Glory', material from which can be found on the Oremus web-site - <http://www.oremus.org/liturgy/pohg/s2.html>

The Funeral Service resources of the Church in Wales - <http://www.churchinwales.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/frb02-en.doc>

Services of Thanksgiving & Remembrance

Every year we are presented with the wonderful mission opportunity to invite those we have met and ministered amongst to an annual service of memorial and thanksgiving. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that many churches host a service in the weeks surrounding All Saints/All Souls days although some churches host them on a more regular basis (two or three times a year). In some places these services attract many visitors whilst in others it is largely the regular congregation.

When to hold the service

The best time seems to be the Sunday afternoon nearest All Saints/All Souls Days. These services are not an All Souls' Requiem, so do not have to be held on that day, while some churches would be happier to link them to a commemoration of 'all the saints'. Afternoon gives the opportunity for an invitation to refreshments after the service or families to go home for tea afterwards.

Invitation is key!

Good practise would suggest that you need to give a personalised invitation to those who have been met through funeral ministry inviting to attend the service; with a more general invitation included in church notices or specifically to those with whom we have pastoral contact. In some churches, special invitations are produced to demonstrate the unique and important nature of the service. It can be helpful to alert those we meet whilst planning funeral services that in the coming autumn they will receive an invitation from the church to attend this special service.

Style of service

Basic research amongst clergy and on the internet would suggest that the style of this service varies greatly from place to place. The important factor seems to be the welcome and inclusion of visitors to worship, which also guides the choice music to relatively well known hymns and tunes. In some places the style of the service echoes the funeral liturgy providing a vaguely familiar pattern for worship.

Experience suggests keeping these services simple and uncluttered, to offer a warm welcome and to expect the majority of service sheets to be taken home as mementos or springboards for further prayer and reflection. In parishes where funeral services are led by a variety of clergy and Readers it can be helpful to have each of those present and taking some active part in this service, building on the links already made.

The service should not be rushed and should include time for silence and reflection at suitable points – obviously after the reading of names if this is not followed by an act of remembrance, such as lighting candles, but after readings and address or before the prayers are other good places for silence. In a service where many people are not used to worship it would be best to tell people what is happening – 'We will take a few moments to be quiet and think about.....'.

The act of remembering

At the heart of the service is the remembrance of those who have died and this can take many forms. In some places a register of names is simply read aloud before a time of silent reflection. In other places this act of remembering provides the opportunity to light candles, create prayer cairns, place pebbles in

buckets of water or to write names on card and place on tree branches or even at the foot of a cross. One church had the names to be remembered read out as dried leaves and petals cascaded to the floor.

The difficulty experienced by some churches is choosing which names to remember and ensuring that no name is omitted in error. Some churches have requested that names to be remembered are submitted in advance of the service whilst others open a register for names at the service itself. With a long list of names to be read it is very helpful to vary the voices as the names are read aloud to prevent it becoming just a long list of names. However long the list reading the names should not be rushed and done in a measured and meaningful way.

To preach or not to preach?

This is an important question to reflect on. In some places a gospel message is preached, making full use of this service as an evangelistic opportunity. More often it would be best to preach an inspiring message of loving hope on these occasions. Suggested themes could focus on the lectionary readings for All Saints & All Souls or specific reflection on Heaven, eternity, the notion of journey, hope and healing, pastoral care, friendship and fellowship. If these services are lay led, as they are in many rural parishes, a prepared reflection could be read or non-scriptural readings such as that found in 'In sure and certain hope' by Paul Sheppey (Canterbury Press) could be used. The resources section contains some 'worked examples' of themes which could be followed, with a short introduction which could be used if there isn't an address.

Something to take away?

One of the great privileges in leading this service is the opportunity to lead people forward in their grief journey and on occasion it can be surprising to see how much pain is actually poured out. Last year we planned to offer each person attending a small gift to take away as a small milestone in their journey though it not easy to know what to actually give away. It could be worth looking at candles, prayer cards, helpful booklets and the like but they need to be appropriate and meaningful. The order of service itself could be used to include thoughts and readings to be used at home.

After the service

Do allow people to take time in church after the service to sit and think., with music being played for a while. If you can arrange for refreshments after the service this gives a chance for conversations, but it would be helpful to make sure there are several church members available to host this and to talk sensitively with those who attend. Don't forget to mention refreshments on your invitation!

A SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING FOR THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

We meet today to remember those we have known and loved who have died, to renew our trust and confidence in Christ, and to pray that together we may be one in him, through whom we offer our praises to the Father.

As a father cares for his children:
so the Lord cares for those who fear him.

For he himself knows whereof we are made:
he remembers that we are but dust.

Our days are like the grass:
we flourish like a flower of the field.

When the wind goes over it, it is gone,
and its place shall know it no more.

But the merciful goodness of the Lord endures for ever on those who fear him:
and his righteousness on children's children.

HYMN

THE ACCLAMATION

Blessed are you, Lord our God, lover of souls
you uphold us in life and sustain us in death:
to you be glory and praise for ever!
For the darkness of this age is passing away
as Christ the bright and morning star
brings to his saints the light of life.
As you give light to those in darkness
who walk in the shadow of death
so remember in your kingdom your faithful servants
that death may be for them the gate to life
and to unending fellowship with you;
where with your saints you live and reign
one in the perfect union of love
now and for ever. **Amen.**

A BIBLE READING

A PSALM or SONG or ANTHEM or REFLECTIVE MUSIC

A BIBLE READING

AN ADDRESS

HYMN

THE PRAYERS

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
he has come to his people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour:
born of the house of his servant David.

In the tender compassion of our God:
the dawn from on high shall break upon us,

To shine on those who dwell in darkness
and the shadow of death,
and to guide our feet into the way of peace.

What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart conceived, God has prepared for those who love him.

The following prayer and/or other intercessions may be used.

God of all consolation,
in your unending love and mercy
you turn the darkness of death
into the dawn of new life.

Show compassion to your people in their sorrow.
Be our refuge and our strength
to lift us from the darkness of grief
to the peace and light of your presence.

Your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ,
by dying for us, conquered death
and by rising again, restored life.

May we then go forward eagerly to meet him,
and after our life on earth
be reunited with our brothers and sisters
where every tear will be wiped away.
We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

In confidence we pray to our Heavenly Father:
Our Father

THE COMMEMORATION

Either:

You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honour and power.

**For you have created all things,
and by your will they have their being.**

You are worthy, O Lamb, for you were slain,
and by your blood you ransomed for God

saints from every tribe and language and nation.
**You have made them to be a kingdom and priests
serving our God,
and they will reign with you on earth.**

The names of those to be remembered may be read aloud. Silence may be kept after each name, or group of names, or after all the names have been read.

This is the will of him that sent me,
that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me,
and I will raise them up at the last day.

Lord God, creator of all,
you have made us creatures of this earth,
but have also promised us a share in life eternal.
According to your promises,
may all who have died in the peace of Christ
come with your saints to the joys of your kingdom,
where there will be neither sorrow nor pain,
but life everlasting.
Alleluia. Amen.

Or:
You, Christ, are the King of Glory.
The eternal Son of the Father.

You overcame the sting of death
And opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.

You are seated at God's right hand in glory
We believe that you will come to be our judge.

**Come then, Lord, and help your people,
bought with the price of your own blood;
and bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.**

Hear us, O merciful Father,
as we remember in love
those whom we have placed in your hands.

The names of those to be remembered may be read aloud. Silence may be kept after each name, or group of names, or after all the names have been read.

Acknowledge, we pray, the sheep of your own fold,
lambs of your own flock,
sinners of your own redeeming.
Enfold them in the arms of your mercy,
in the blessed rest of everlasting peace,
and in the glorious company of the saints in light. **Amen.**

A time of silence and reflection

(If you wish to include an act of remembrance add the appropriate instructions for whatever have decided upon and how that is to take place. During this time quiet music can be played or a choir or music group could sing.)

As we remember those who have died and affirm that they are in God's keeping, we invite you to light a candle and ... ***or place a stone or...***

Grant to us, Lord God,
to trust you not for ourselves alone,
but for those also whom we love
and who are hidden from us by the shadow of death;
that, as we believe your power to have raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead,
so may we trust your love to give eternal life to all who believe in him;
through Jesus Christ our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

HYMN

THE BLESSING

Either:

The Lord bless *you* and keep *you*,
the Lord make his face to shine upon *you*
and be gracious to *you*,
the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon *you*
and give *you* peace.

And the blessing of the God almighty,
The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon *you* and remain with *you* always,
Amen.

Or:

May God give to you and to all those whom you love
his comfort and his peace,
his light and his joy,
in this world and the next;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be upon *you* and remain with *you* always. **Amen**

A SERVICE REMEMBERING THOSE WHO HAVE DIED

We come today to remember with thankfulness those we have known and loved who have died. We give thanks for all that they have meant to us. We come seeking to learn of God's love and to open our lives to the help and strength that he can give us as we continue on the journey of life without them. We pray for ourselves and all who mourn that they would be comforted.

HYMN

Eternal God and Father,
we praise you that you have made people
to share life together
and to reflect your glory in the world.
We thank you now for those whom we come to remember today,
for all that we saw of your goodness and love in their lives
and for all that they have meant to us.
As we too journey towards death
may we do so in the company of Jesus,
who came to share our life
that we might share the life of eternity.
To him be glory with you and the Holy Spirit
for ever and ever.
Amen.

A BIBLE READING

A PSALM or SONG or ANTHEM or REFLECTIVE MUSIC

A BIBLE READING

AN ADDRESS

followed by time for silence and reflection

HYMN

Let us affirm the good news we have received,
in which we stand,
through which we are saved
and which we hand on to others.
**Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles:
this we have received,
and this we believe. Amen.**

REMEMBERING with THANKSGIVING

God of grace and glory,
we come to remember especially before you today

(The names of those to be remembered may be read aloud. Silence may be kept after each name, or group of names, or after all the names have been read.)

We thank you for giving them to us
to know and to love as companions
in our pilgrimage on earth.
In your boundless compassion
console those who mourn.
Grant us that we may see in death
the gate of everlasting life
and continue our course on earth in faith,
though Jesus Christ our Lord,
the Life and the Resurrection of all
who put their trust in him.

As we remember those who have died and affirm that they are in God's keeping, we invite you to light a candle and ... ***or place a stone or...***

(Add the appropriate instructions for whatever form of act of remembrance you have decided upon and how that is to take place. During this time quiet music can be played or a choir or music group could sing.)

God, our Father,
we thank you that you sent your Son Jesus Christ
to die for us and rise again.
His cross declares your love to be without limit;
his resurrection, that death our last enemy is doomed.
By his victory we are assured of the promise
that you will never leave us or forsake us;
that neither death nor life,
nor things present nor things to come,
can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen.**

(Other prayers of intercession follow.)

We sum up our prayers in the words that Jesus taught us:
Our Father ...

HYMN

The Lord God almighty is our Father: he loves us and tenderly cares for us.
The Lord Jesus Christ is our Saviour: he has redeemed us and will defend us to the end.
The Lord, the Holy Spirit is among us: he will lead us in God's holy way.
To God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: be praise and glory today and for ever. **Amen.**

ACTS OF REMEMBRANCE

Services which remember those who have died often include the chance to take some action which gives time for specific thanksgiving, remembrance or prayer. Often it acts as a symbol of placing the person being remembered into God's safe keeping, which can be helpful in the journey of grief. The most common way of doing this is by lighting a candle but churches have made use of other ideas.

1. **Lighting a candle.** If you are following the tradition of lighting candles some thought needs to be given to 'health and safety' as you consider how the candles are to be lit and where they are to be placed. If you have a Paschal Candle the initial candle at least could be lit from that as a link with the resurrection victory of Christ.
2. **Stones** or pebbles or glass beads can be dropped **into a bowl of water**, as a symbol of 'letting go'.
3. **Stones** or pebbles can also be built into a 'cairn' in a suitable place, as a symbol of placing the person remembered into God's hands.
4. Everyone can be given a **card**, possibly in heart or cross shapes, on which to write the name(s) of those they wish to remember and these can be placed into a basket or at the foot of a cross as a symbol of remembrance and thankfulness.
5. Names can be written on **cardboard leaves** in autumn colours as people arrive and these can be gradually scattered at the foot of the altar table as names are read.
6. **Flowers** can be placed in a vase or in a basket (or alternatively taken away as a reminder of the person who has died).
7. Everyone can be invited to take a **prayer card** or a **card with a Bible verse or a Psalm** and encouraged to use it for reflection at home.
8. The **list of names** or a **Book of remembrance** could be placed on the altar table or at the foot of a cross. This could be helpful if the list of names is too long to read in a service. They could be printed in the order of service and then presented during a time of reflection and remembrance.

RESOURCES

READINGS

Isaiah 51:1-3 & 1-16; Sorrow and sighing will flee away

Lamentations 3:22-26 & 31-33; The Lord's mercies are new every morning

Ezekiel 34:11-16; God as shepherd

Matthew 5:1-12a; The Beatitudes.

Matthew 11:25-30; I will give you rest.

Luke 24:13-16, (17-27), 28-35; The road to Emmaus.

John 5:24-29; 6:37-40; Seeing the Son and believing in him.

John 10:11-16; I am the good Shepherd.

John 11:21-27; I am the resurrection and the life.

John 11:17-36; Jesus meets with Mary and

Martha after the death of their brother Lazarus.

John 11:38-45; Jesus raises Lazarus from death.

John 14:1-6; I am the way, the truth and the life.

John 20:1-9; The resurrection.

Romans 8:31b-39; Nothing will separate us from the love of God

1 Corinthians 15:3-20; Witness to the risen Christ.

1 Corinthians 15: 51-58; Death, where is your victory?

2 Corinthians 4:16 - 5:9; Incomparable glory.

Philippians 3:7-11; The power of Christ's resurrection

1 Peter 1:3-9; A living hope.

Revelation 7:9-17; God will wipe away every tear.

Revelation 20:11-13; The book of life.

Revelation 21:1-7; The new Jerusalem.

PSALMS

Psalms 23; The Lord is my shepherd

Psalms 42; My soul longs for God

Psalms 90:1-6, 10, 12-17; God our help

Psalms 103:1-4, 11-18; God redeems and rescues

Psalms 121; I lift my eyes to the hills

Psalms 130; Trusting God when in despair

Psalms 139:1-12; God is always with us

HYMNS

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound

Be still my soul

Be thou my vision

Faithful vigil ended

For all the saints

Great is thy faithfulness

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer

How sweet the name of Jesus sounds

I know that my Redeemer lives

I will sing the wondrous story

Immortal, invisible, God only wise

In heavenly love abiding

Jesu, lover of my soul

Lord of all hopefulness

Love divine, all loves excelling

Now is eternal life

Now thank we all our God

O God, our help in ages past

O love, that wilt not let me go

O Lord my God (How great thou art)

O strength and stay

O the deep, deep love of Jesus

Praise my soul the King of heaven

Praise to the Lord, the almighty

Rock of ages cleft for me

Saviour, to thy dear name we raise

The day thou gavest

The King of love my shepherd is

The Lord's my shepherd

The strife is o'er

Through all the changing scenes of life

Through the love of God our Saviour

Thine be the glory

What a friend we have in Jesus

SONGS

As the deer pants for the water

Be still and know

Be still for the presence of the Lord

Do not be afraid

Father, I place into your hands

Going home

I watch the sun-rise

Like a mighty river flowing

O let the Son of God enfold you

O Lord, your tenderness

Peace I give to you
Peace to you
Safe in the shadow
The Lord's my Shepherd (And I will trust in you
alone)
There is a Redeemer

CHANTS

Bless the Lord, my soul
The Lord is my light
Jesus, remember me
O Lord, hear my prayer

ANTHEMS

The Lord bless you and keep you – John Rutter
A Clare Benediction - John Rutter
The Lord is my Shepherd - John Rutter
Gaelic Blessing - John Rutter
Psalm 23 - Howard Goodall
Pie Jesus - Gabriel Fauré
In paradisum - Gabriel Fauré
God so loved the world – John Stainer
God be in my head - Walford Davies
Nunc Dimittis - Geoffrey Burgon (or others)
Beati quorum via –Stanford
How lovely are thy dwellings - Brahms
Greater love has no man - John Ireland
The Lord is my shepherd - Schubert
Brother James's Air

PRAYERS

1.

In faith and hope we pray,
Lord of mercy,
Lord, hear us.

Almighty God,
you bring your chosen people together
in one communion,
in the body of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
We rejoice in your light and your peace
with your whole Church in heaven and on earth.
Lord of mercy,
Lord, hear us.

Give to all who mourn a sure confidence
in your loving care,
that we may cast all our sorrow on you
and know the consolation of your love.
Lord of mercy,
Lord, hear us.

Give your faithful people pardon and peace,
that we may be cleansed from all our sins
and serve you with a quiet mind.
Lord of mercy,
Lord, hear us.

Give us strength to meet the days ahead
in the joyful expectation of eternal life
with those you love.
Lord of mercy,
Lord, hear us.

Give to us who are still in our pilgrimage,
and who walk as yet by faith,
your Holy Spirit to lead us in holiness and
righteousness
all our days.
Lord of mercy,
Lord, hear us.

May all who have been made one with Christ
in his death and in his resurrection
die to sin and rise to newness of life.
Lord of mercy,
Lord, hear us.

2.

Let us pray to the Lord, who has conquered death.

Jesus, bread from heaven,

you satisfy the hungry with good things:
grant us a share with all the faithful departed
in the banquet of your kingdom.
Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, the light of the world,
you gave the man born blind the gift of sight:
open the eye of faith
and bring us from darkness
to your eternal light and glory.
Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, Son of the living God,
you summoned your friend Lazarus from death to
life:
raise us at the last to full and eternal life with you.
Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, crucified Saviour,
in your dying you entrusted each to the other,
Mary your mother and John your beloved disciple:
sustain and comfort all who mourn.
Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

Jesus, our way and truth and life,
you drew your disciple Thomas from doubt to faith:
reveal the resurrection faith to the doubting and the
lost.
Hear us, risen Lord,
our resurrection and our life.

May God in his infinite love and mercy
bring the whole Church,
living and departed in the Lord Jesus,
to a joyful resurrection
and the fulfilment of his eternal kingdom.
All Amen.

3.

God our refuge and strength,
close at hand in our distress;
meet us in our sorrow and lift our eyes
to the peace and light of your constant care.
Help us so to hear your word of grace
that our fear will be dispelled by your love,
our loneliness eased by your presence
and our hope renewed by your promises
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

4.
The Lord is here,
his Spirit is with us.

We need not fear,
his Spirit is with us.

We are surrounded by love,
his Spirit is with us.

We are immersed in peace,
his Spirit is with us.

We rejoice in hope,
his Spirit is with us.

We travel in faith,
his Spirit is with us.

5.
Heavenly Father, you are our refuge and strength.
Help and comfort us today:
increase our faith,
dispel our fears,
revive our hope.
May the Holy Spirit lift us from the darkness of our
grief to the light of your presence; through Jesus
Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

6.
Lord of all, we praise you
for all who have entered into their rest
and reached the promised land where you are seen
face to face.
Give us grace to follow in their footsteps
as they followed in the way of your Son.
Thank you for the memory of those you have called
to yourself:
by each memory, turn our hearts from things seen to
things unseen,
and lead us till we come to the eternal rest
you have prepared for your people,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

7.
Heavenly Father,
in your Son Jesus Christ
you have given us a true faith and a sure hope.
Strengthen this faith and hope in us all our days,
that we may live as those who believe in
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,

and the resurrection to eternal life;
through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

8.
Grant to us, Lord God,
to trust you not for ourselves alone,
but for those also whom we love
and who are hidden from us by the shadow of death;
that, as we believe your power to have raised our
Lord Jesus Christ
from the dead,
so may we trust your love
to give eternal life to all who believe in him;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

9.
We pray to Jesus who is present with us to eternity.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, light of the world,
bring the light and peace of your gospel to
the nations.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, bread of life,
give food to the hungry
and nourish us all with your word.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, our way, our truth, our life,
be with us and all who follow you in the way.
Deepen our appreciation of your truth
and fill us with your life.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, Good Shepherd who gave your life for the
sheep,
recover the straggler,
bind up the injured,
strengthen the sick
and lead the healthy and strong to new pastures.
Jesus, Lord of life,
in your mercy, hear us.

Jesus, the resurrection and the life,
we give you thanks for all who have lived and
believed in you especially those we remember today.
Raise us with them to eternal life.
Jesus, Lord of life,

**in your mercy, hear us,
accept our prayers, and be with us always.
Amen.**

10.
You, Christ, are the King of Glory,
the eternal Son of the Father.

You overcame the sting of death
**and opened the kingdom of heaven to all
believers.**

You are seated at God's right hand in glory,
we believe that you will come to be our judge.

**Come then, Lord, and help your people,
bought with the price of your own blood;
and bring us with your saints
to glory everlasting.**

11.
Lord Jesus, you have shown us the way to the
Father:
Lord, have mercy. **(Lord, have mercy.)**

Lord Jesus, your word is a light to our path:
Christ, have mercy. **(Christ, have mercy.)**

Lord Jesus, you are the good shepherd,
leading us into everlasting life:
Lord, have mercy. **(Lord, have mercy.)**

12.
Lord Jesus Christ,
you comforted your disciples when you were going
to die:
now set our troubled hearts at rest
and banish our fears.
You are the way to the Father:
help us to follow you.
You are the truth:
bring us to know you.

You are the life: give us that life,
to live with you now and for ever. **Amen.**

13.
You raise the dead to life in the Spirit:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.
You bring pardon and peace to the broken in heart:
Christ, have mercy.
Christ, have mercy.
You make one by your Spirit the torn and divided:
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

14.
Lord God,
you are attentive to the voice of our pleading.
Let us find in your Son
comfort in our sadness,
certainty in our doubt
and courage to live.
Make our faith strong
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

15.
God of mercy, Lord of life,
you have made us in your image
to reflect your truth and light:
we give you thanks for those whom we remember
today
for the grace and mercy they received from you,
for all that was good in their lives,
for the memories we treasure today.

We thank you for all who through your grace
have lived according to your will
and are now at rest.
May their good example encourage and guide us
all the days of our life.
Meet us in our sadness
and fill our hearts with praise and thanksgiving.
Amen.

EXAMPLES OF POSSIBLE THEMES

I. THE WAY, THE TRUTH, THE LIFE

‘What happens when we die?’ ‘Is there life after death?’ are questions human beings have always asked. Virtually all societies have believed that death is not the end. How that life is pictured has varied enormously. The Christian hope of resurrection is based on Christ’s promises and his own victory over death. As Jesus prepared his disciples for the fact that he was going to die, rise and return to the glory of heaven, he assured them that he was going to prepare a place for them. He is the way, the truth, the life and believing in him brings us to God and to heaven.

We are not given detailed descriptions of heaven. What the Bible does say is that we will share in Christ’s victory over death. In dying he dealt with the problem of our sin and its consequences, including death. In rising to life he has conquered death. As a result we will be raised with bodies that reflect his – immortal, imperishable, glorious. This exceeds all our imagining! Knowing this gives us hope and assurance. It encourages us to go on living, loving and serving when we are faced by suffering and death. Death is not the end.

First reading: I Corinthians 15.50-58

⁵⁰ What I am saying, brothers and sisters, is this: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. ⁵¹ Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled:

‘Death has been swallowed up in victory.’

⁵⁵ ‘Where, O death, is your victory?

Where, O death, is your sting?’

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved, be steadfast, immovable, always excelling in the work of the Lord, because you know that in the Lord your labour is not in vain.

CANTICLE (from The Easter Anthems)

Christ once raised from the dead dies no more:
death has no more dominion over him.

**In dying he died to sin once for all:
in living he lives to God.**

See yourselves therefore as dead to sin:
and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Christ has been raised from the dead:
the first fruits of those who sleep.**

For as by man came death:
by man has come also the resurrection of the dead;

**for as in Adam all die:
even so in Christ shall all be made alive.**

Second Reading: John 14.1-6

'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. ²In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. ⁴And you know the way to the place where I am going.' ⁵Thomas said to him, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?' ⁶Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'

A PRAYER

Lord Jesus Christ,
you comforted your disciples when you were going to die:
now set our troubled hearts at rest
and banish our fears.
You are the way to the Father:
help us to follow you.
You are the truth:
bring us to know you.
You are the life:
give us that life,
to live with you now and for ever. **Amen.**

HYMNS

Now is eternal life (can be sung to Darwall's 148th)
Thine be the glory
I know that my redeemer lives
O Lord my God (How great thou art)
I will sing the wondrous story

SONGS or MUSIC for reflection

Father, I place into your hands
Going home
There is a Redeemer
Jesus, remember me
Pie Jesus – Gabriel Fauré
God so loved the world – John Stainer

2. KNOWING GOD'S LOVE

When someone we love dies we can feel very alone. The experience of loss can seem very cruel. If the loss is a sudden one it can feel as if someone we love has been torn away from us. When their death has followed illness and suffering that can be a painful experience. It is not unusual in such circumstances to question whether God is indeed loving. In times of loss all our thoughts and feelings can be rather mixed up.

The first reading is from the book of Lamentations, a book in which the writer is burdened by the suffering that surrounds him. These verses, however, are words of hope and faith. God is faithful and his mercies come to us 'new every morning', day by day as we reach out to him and find his sustaining presence. In the reading from Romans Paul speaks of the experience of suffering – the tribulations of life and the opposition which Christians sometimes experience. None of these things, he says, can separate us from the love of God. That love has been shown in what Christ has done for us. He has died so that our sin can be forgiven and we can be 'justified', brought into a right relationship to God. He has been raised from death and now he prays for us in our need. God is on our side. Whatever we feel, whatever difficult experiences and grief we go through, nothing can separate us from his love.

1st Reading – Lamentations 3.22-26 & 31-33

The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
²³ they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
²⁴ 'The LORD is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.'
²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the LORD.
³¹ For the Lord will not
reject for ever.
³² Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
³³ for he does not willingly afflict
or grieve anyone.

Psalm 121

I lift up my eyes to the hills;
from where is my help to come?

**My help comes from the Lord,
the maker of heaven and earth.**

He will not suffer your foot to stumble;
he who watches over you will not sleep.

**Behold, he who keeps watch over Israel
shall neither slumber nor sleep.**

The Lord himself watches over you;

the Lord is your shade at your right hand,

**So that the sun shall not strike you by day,
neither the moon by night.**

The Lord shall keep you from all evil;
it is he who shall keep your soul.

**The Lord shall keep watch over your going out
and your coming in,
from this time forth for evermore.**

2nd Reading – Romans 8.31-39

What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³² He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³ Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵ Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.'³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

A PRAYER

God, our Father,
we thank you that you sent your Son Jesus Christ
to die for us and rise again.
His cross declares your love to be without limit;
his resurrection, that death our last enemy is doomed.
By his victory we are assured of the promise
that you will never leave us or forsake us;
that neither death nor life,
nor things present nor things to come,
can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. **Amen**

HYMNS

Love divine, all loves excelling
Great is thy faithfulness
In heavenly love abiding
Through the love of God our Saviour
O love that wilt not let me go

SONGS or MUSIC for reflection

Peace I give to you
There is a redeemer
Bless the Lord, my soul
Jesu, joy of man's desiring (Bach)
The Claire Blessing (John Rutter)

3. SHARING OUR GRIEF

The death of someone we know and love can be a very confusing time. It raises all sorts of questions in our minds – ‘Why?’ ‘Couldn’t God have stopped it happening?’ We feel lost. Some find themselves crying. Others find it hard to express their feelings. After a while we can worry that we haven’t ‘got over it’. Such feelings are quite normal. The readings from John 11 show us Mary and Martha asking these sorts of questions when their brother Lazarus had died. Why had Jesus not come sooner? Couldn’t he have prevented Lazarus’ death? Mary and Martha show that people react to death differently. Martha is more ‘down to earth’. Mary is more emotional and tearful.

These verses show us Jesus responding sensitively to both of them. He responds to their questions. He joins Mary in her tears. He too feels grief at the death of someone he loves. He also assures them that he is the resurrection and the life and that those who believe in him have eternal life. He demonstrates the truth of that by raising Lazarus from the dead, to the astonishment of everyone. Lazarus will in time die like everyone else but a few weeks later, after he had been crucified, Jesus is himself raised to life. In dying he dealt with our sin. In rising he has conquered death. His resurrection is the chief guarantee that he is ‘the resurrection and the life’ and that he gives eternal life to those who believe in him.

First Reading: John 11.17-36

¹⁷When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. ¹⁸Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, ¹⁹and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²²But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.’ ²³Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ ²⁴Martha said to him, ‘I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.’ ²⁵Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’ ²⁷She said to him, ‘Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.’

²⁸When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, ‘The Teacher is here and is calling for you.’ ²⁹And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³²When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, ‘Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.’ ³³When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴He said, ‘Where have you laid him?’ They said to him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ ³⁵Jesus began to weep. ³⁶So the Jews said, ‘See how he loved him!’

Psalm 116.1-8

I love the Lord, for he has heard the voice of my supplication;
because he inclined his ear to me on the day I called to him.

**The snares of death encompassed me;
the pains of hell took hold of me; by grief and sorrow was I held.**

Then I called upon the name of the Lord:
‘O Lord, I beg you, deliver my soul.’

**Gracious is the Lord and righteous;
our God is full of compassion.**

The Lord watches over the simple;
I was brought very low and he saved me.

**Turn again to your rest, O my soul,
for the Lord has been gracious to you.**

For you have delivered my soul from death,
my eyes from tears and my feet from falling.

**I will walk before the Lord
in the land of the living.**

Second Reading: John 11.38-45

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.
³⁹ Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.'
⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?'
⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me.'
⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.'
⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!'
⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'
⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

A PRAYER

God of all consolation,
your Son Jesus Christ was moved to tears
at the grave of Lazarus his friend.
Look with compassion on your children in their loss;
give to troubled hearts the light of hope
and strengthen in us the gift of faith
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

HYMNS:

Praise my soul, the King of heaven
Jesu, lover of my soul
Thine be the glory
Be still my soul
What a friend we have in Jesus

SONGS or MUSIC for reflection

Do not be afraid
Father, I place into your hands
Safe in the shadow
I am the bread of life
I know that my redeemer liveth (from Handel's
Messiah)

4. WALKING WITH THE GOOD SHEPHERD

If you are going on a difficult journey it's really helpful to have a tour guide who knows about the places you are visiting and who can make sure you get to your destination. They can show you the way, point you to the places to eat and sort out the problems you face. Our journey through life is one that sometimes is easy and sometimes can be difficult. Facing suffering and death in particular can be challenging. It's not surprising then that we find it encouraging that we don't have to make that journey on our own. The Bible's picture of God as shepherd accompanying us on that journey is one that has brought strength and encouragement to many over the years.

In the book of Ezekiel God speaks of himself as a shepherd and Jesus claims that title for himself in the reading from John, but it is the words of Psalm 23 which many have found especially helpful. Here is an image of a God who is there in good times and bad, who guides us and provides for us. When we are hurt he brings us healing. When we are lost he seeks for us and brings us back – a God who forgives and restores those who have wandered away from him. He strengthens and protects us in the darkest hours, in the 'valley of the shadow of death'. He is the one who brings us through to feasting and rejoicing – heaven is often pictured as a banquet in the Bible. Jesus as Good Shepherd laid down his life, dying on the cross that we might be forgiven. He has now been raised from death and promises eternal life to those who belong to him. He is alongside us every step of the way on the journey of life.

First reading: Ezekiel 34.11-16a

¹¹ For thus says the Lord GOD: I myself will search for my sheep, and will seek them out. ¹² As shepherds seek out their flocks when they are among their scattered sheep, so I will seek out my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places to which they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness. ¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the watercourses, and in all the inhabited parts of the land. ¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture, and the mountain heights of Israel shall be their pasture; there they shall lie down in good grazing land, and they shall feed on rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. ¹⁵ I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep, and I will make them lie down, says the Lord GOD. ¹⁶ I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak.

Psalm 23

1 The Lord is my shepherd;
therefore can I lack nothing.

**2 He makes me lie down in green pastures
and leads me beside still waters.**

3 He shall refresh my soul
and guide me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

**4 Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff, they comfort me.**

5 You spread a table before me
in the presence of those who trouble me;

you have anointed my head with oil
and my cup shall be full.

**6 Surely goodness and loving mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.**

Second Reading: John 10.11-18

¹¹ 'I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. ¹² The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away - and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. ¹³ The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. ¹⁴ I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, ¹⁵ just as the Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. ¹⁶ I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd. ¹⁷ For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again. ¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again. I have received this command from my Father.'

A PRAYER

May Christ the good shepherd
enfold us with love,
fill us with peace,
and lead us in hope,
to the end of our days.

Amen.

HYMNS

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty
The King of love my shepherd is
The Lord's my shepherd
In heavenly love abiding
Through all the changing scenes of life

SONGS or MUSIC for reflection

The Lord's my shepherd (And I will trust in you alone)
O let the Son of God enfold you
Be still and know
Bless the Lord, my soul
Psalm 23 (Howard Goodall)
Psalm 23 (John Rutter)
The Lord is my shepherd - Schubert
Brother James's Air