

This morning we gather here in St Mary's for a simple Memorial Service for Jim and Eva Smith, a Parish and community of which they were a part for many years. Jim served on the Vestry for many years and would have had a high regard for Canon Frank Blennerhassett. Eva in her day was an accomplished sports woman excelling as a cyclist. The loss of mobility must have been very hard to bear. Jim and Eva were very much a team and Jim would have spoken with pride of their meeting, their first flat of how they worked together to build a home, a business, a family.

The family are left with memories of loving parents, devoted to each other. People recall firm friendships and generosity of spirit. You are left with your memories on this the first Christmas since Eva's death.

The death of loved ones is a time for a very proper sadness and those who have been so central to our lives, who have a source of strength and advice are now no longer with us. There is a gap that no one else can fill in quite the same way. We come here to set that loss, that sadness, that gap in the context of our Christian faith. Over this Christmas period in St Mary's we have been reflecting on those words from St John, 'The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.' This is a light that has continued to shine through some of the darkest periods in human history. In this I am reminded that we follow a Lord who knows what death, what suffering, what loss is all about; one who knew what it was like to weep and the grave of his friend Lazarus. Not only that, he is the one who was raised triumphant over death, breaking the power of death itself. Knowing in his own person what it was all

about, I find in him one to whom I can come in my own time of suffering and find real comfort, real strength and real hope.

A passage I often find myself turning to at a time of a funeral is from St Paul's second letter to the Church at Corinth. the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. In this Paul presents us with the reality of our own mortality and death, he talks very plainly of the body wearing out. But just as he talks of the reality of physical decline and death, Paul talks of our new heavenly home. The words that really stand out for me are ; "So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." This is our hope for Joan Byrne, that all the limitations of these latter years, the frailty, the forgetfulness, along with all the limitations that go with being human are "swallowed up by life", that is our inheritance in Christ.

Today I would invite you, in the quietness of this Parish Church to come before God with your own particular memories of Jim and Eva, as Mum and Dad, as friends, ones whose love and friendship you enjoyed over the years.

May you may know something of the peace and presence of God, that in his presence you may find peace and hope both for yourselves and for Jim and Eva.

I will close with a prayer that brings home to me the hope that we have in Christ for ourselves and for those who have gone before us in the faith.

We give them back to thee, dear Lord, who gavest them to us. Yet as thou didst not lose them in giving, so we have not lost them by their return. What

thou gavest thou takest not away, O Lover of souls; for what is thine is ours also if we are thine. And life is eternal and love is immortal, and death is only an horizon, and an horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight. Lift us up, strong Son of God, that we may see further; cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly; and draw us closer to thyself that we may know ourselves to be nearer to our loved ones who are with thee. And while thou dost prepare for us, prepare us also for that happy place, that where they are and thou art, we too may be for evermore.