



2nd November 2020
All Souls' Day
Lamentations 3.17-26, 31-33 | John 6.37-40
'We remember; we claim back from November.'
St James's Piccadilly
The Revd Dr Ivan Khovacs

* * *

And so, before we know it, it's November.

November is a month of contrasts and contradictions. It is a battleground between the squirrel and the acorn swollen with ripening. A battleground between memories of summer's warmth and winter's chill we can already feel seeping into our rooms. But battlegrounds claim their victims. And in this way, sadly, this November comes roaring like no other.

And maybe the only way to face the days ahead is to strike a deal with November: to say, Okay, you can have the late autumn light of our Northern Hemisphere, you can have the last of the leaves on our trees, you can have our early evenings and plunge them into night ...

But we will keep just a little longer a few late flowers still blooming in our garden. And we will make this a month of Memories and Remembrance. We will keep faith with the saints of the past. And today, on this day of All Soul's, we will keep faith with those who have died,= and remember them in this Requiem Eucharist: We will say their names.

We won't in any way paper over the loss or diminish the consolation we need for the people who left empty spaces in our lives that can never be refilled.

We will step into November in our bereavement, with our grief, no matter how many years it's been—and we will inhabit the words in our reading from Lamentations:

My soul is bereft of peace; I have forgotten what happiness is; so I say, 'Gone is my glory, and any-thing good I had hoped for from God': my bereavement is my homelessness...
(Lamentations 3.17-18; para.)

And so this November we will keep our memories, and we will keep this moment of naming what we have lost, those we have loved.

But how do we remember?

"Re-member" is the opposite of dis-member. To remember is to put back together what has been separated, disjointed, dis-membered. And so today we re-member. Death separates us from those we love. But we re-member and name re-join ourselves to them and them to us.

And what do we re-member?

We remember someone who touched us because they PRAYED, someone who gave their TIME for us, someone who made SPACE for us, and who invited CONVERSATION from us.

Who are you thinking of tonight? Do you think of someone who PRAYED for you? Was there someone who you knew kept you in their prayers. Or someone who perhaps offered, once, to pray with you. Was this someone who had faith in you? Someone who believed in you? Someone who had confidence in you, when you did not feel so confident yourself?

Or, think of someone who made TIME for you. Someone who invited you into their company and took time to be with you. Is there some who you knew dropped everything just to be there for you in a time of need.

Is this someone who knew how to make SPACE for you. Is it a parent, a grandparent, sibling or another family member, who knew hospitality.

I have a great aunt, a person dear to me, an older person, now in hospital, in the final stages of cancer. She was a professional; always lived alone, always in her one-room apartment. But when we were kids, there was always room on the sofa for an overnight or weekend stay. We weren't allowed to touch her porcelain figurines and miniatures and souvenirs from her travels round the world. But for us her little flat was always home away from home.

Think of someone who hosted you in their home, who made for you a home away from home.

And did you have someone in your life who found ways to bring you into CONVERSATION, the kind of conversation which is less about talking and more about listening? Was it someone who was good at reflecting back to you your own thoughts ... allowing you to say things in your own voice? Someone who made you feel listened to because they asked questions, "how did that make you feel?" "What do you think you'll do?" "What can I do?"

PRAYER, TIME, SPACE, and CONVERSATION.

We remember, and we are re-membered, re-joined, re-gathered with those we have lost.

* * *

Tonight, as we head into this new period of lockdown, I look around this church, this open space, and I think of that line from T.S. Eliot's East Coker:

"like a theatre after its applause,
This house will fall again to silence."

We won't be meeting here for some time; we don't know how long. And maybe it's just as well that in this act of remembrance, this Requiem, these musical strains and these NAMES, these scents of holiness and incense, will be left suspended, at peace, between these walls.

This year has been extraordinarily difficult for so many. It has, most of all, deprived us of human touch, of contact with the very people who sustain us, and who we sustain in our love, in relationship, in friendship in embrace.

But this evening, in our act of naming and remembering, we claim back from November the only assurance we know, the only consolation, the only solace we seek: the assurance of Jesus from John's Gospel, that those who die die in the presence of the living God:

"Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away."

AMEN.