

'In Loving Memory'

November 3rd 2019 Anna Castley

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this service today, titled "In Loving Memory", My name is Anna Castley – I live locally, have worked for years as a bereavement counsellor and attend the church of the Transfiguration.

It is a remarkable fact that we all suffer loss from the day of our birth – losing the warm and supportive womb of our mother and entering the world. Loss, as you will all know, comes in many guises, and at all sorts of different times in our lives. We lose friends, family members, homes, security. Relationship, jobs – the list is endless – and each loss creates different scenarios, emotions, and in the longer term, memories. Many seem impossible to bear at the time – "the greater the love the greater the loss" is the textbook statement, but as you all know each loss is unique and affects us in different ways. I hope what I have to say is helpful to you and does not stir up too many painful memories.

I am a great believer that we are gifted people, be it children, grandchildren, parents, partners or friends, and that we should be thankful for the time – be it short or long – that we share their lives. There is nothing we can do to shorten or lengthen this time, but we can try to make the most of each day.

Let us start with children. It is always very difficult to comprehend the loss of a child.

The "if onlys" and "whys", which dominate many people's grief get us nowhere. We lost our first grandchild – a tiny babe whom we scarcely know – and could only share the desperate sadness of our son and daughter in law. Never say "I understand how you feel" to the bereaved. You don't.

Many years later we lost a much beloved son, Simon, in a motorcycle accident. This was a sudden event, shocking and hard to accept. This time we were cushioned – it was far more than supported – by his surviving five brothers and two sisters. The boys carried his coffin, and despite the awful sadness and feelings of such a waste of a young life, I was able to be very thankful to have shared his 29 years and all that we had done together.

Let us move on to a dearly loved husband. My first husband, Mark was shot by the IRA in the front garden of our Army quarters in Germany. This again was a sudden event, made more difficult by the media. I wasn't even allowed to open my own front door, answer the phone or take the children swimming without a police escort. Life was further complicated by the necessity to stay strong for the children's sake, let alone having to tell them what had happened.

All of a sudden I was head of the family. The bottom had fallen out of my world and every decision and the responsibility for a large family was mine. I well remember walking down a high street in England in floods of tears – you don't care what passers-by might think – saying to the good Lord "Right, you put me in this position. I cannot cope along. I will do all I can, but you are going to have to be alongside me and help" And He did. In this scenario it was

more difficult to be thankful for the past, as the shock element was there too, but my strong Christian faith helped me through. I gradually learned to use my experience to help others, and to manage life as a single parent.

Let us move on to long protracted illnesses that sadly prove to be terminal. This was the conclusion of my second husband, John's life, and was shared by my then adult children, their partners and my grandchildren. Each made their own valuable contribution, right down to the smallest – a baby – who sat on his Grandpa's hospital bed, playing with the cannula. Again there was tremendous bonding – we all shared the journey through different eyes, and all were able to be thankful for his good life, his humour, his kindness, his love and despite the deep sadness, were able to share our love for him.

In conclusion, we all have many memories of our loved ones, whether they shared our lives for a short time or much longer. They would not wish us to mourn their death as Queen Victoria did of Albert, totally overwhelmed and unable to move on for the remaining 40 years of her life. Let us try to be thankful for each day, and for the lives of those we have loved and lost, sure in the believer's knowledge that they are now in God's everlasting kingdom, and have eternal life. In every time of desperation, I have put my troubles at the foot of Christ's cross, and asked Him to help me bear them – He always does.

Do not be afraid of memories. Do not be afraid of tears. We are only human, and often the most surprising people prove to be the most supportive. Memories are special, they are unique, and they are precious. Do not be afraid to talk

about those you have lost, or to laugh again. Remember we have all lost people we have loved, and still love, despite the fact that they are no longer physically with us.

Finally, I would like to share with you this piece known as "The Gate of the Year", which has always been very special to me.

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year. 'Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown'. And he replied, 'Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way'. So I went forth and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night."

Amen