

The Good News version of Matt Ch 5 v4 is **“Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them”**

Is that our experience – do we feel that God is comforting us in our loss. Or do we feel far from him, alone in the pain of grief. It can be all too easy as committed Christians to offer platitudes to those who mourn, expecting them to be comforted by our words. They in turn may want to shout and scream that no one understands how they are feeling, and, how is death the action of a loving God? Death can make us doubt the very existence of God, rocking our world, removing our certainties and making us realise how little control we have in life. Our world shifts on its axis and nothing is ever quite the same again.

Tonight, we are especially remembering those we love who have died and we may still be struggling to make sense of what has happened to them, to us, and to find a way through our loss because our love for them is so strong. If their life was unexpectedly cut short we may be asking ‘Why’ and ‘What if’ And how can I go on without them? Where is the meaning in my life? Will I ever again feel peace, and experience joy in living, Is this even possible? The journey of grief is hard and painful. Death takes time to accept, if we ever do, but I do believe that we can eventually find reasons to live again because of this verse: **‘Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them’.**

I would like to share a few thoughts as to why I believe God does truly love us and has not abandoned us in our grief. Death stares us in the face when someone close to us dies. For the person who has died, it may be the end of a long struggle with life. For those left behind, the realisation of being separated can be intensely painful and hard to make sense of. God understands our despair and wants to hold us up, as recognised in a poem called ‘Footprints in the sand’, which says that when there are only one set of footprints, God is carrying us. How can we be so sure of this? Partly through God sending his only Son, Jesus, to earth for us. Through Jesus we are shown the way to live selfless lives, loving others before ourselves. But what did we do? We put Jesus on a cross to die. So God had to suffer the pain of seeing his own Son rejected and despised and he had to watch as he died an agonising death. God therefore knows how it feels when we are in anguish over the death of someone we deeply love and care for. He wants to come alongside to offer us hope of recovery and to give us new meaning in life. But how can he do this?

Firstly, God offers comfort and speaks to us by the words written in the bible. Looking at the psalms we see how often the psalmist is crying out to God in pain and sorrow. And yet the psalms are also full of praise and hope and a realisation that the pain in life can be eased if we put our trust in God. Reflect upon these verses from the psalms: 23 **‘Though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and your staff comfort me’.** 56 **‘When I am afraid, I will trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I will not be afraid’.** 40 **“I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet**

on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the Lord.” So we see that God can lift us out of our despair if we allow him into our hearts and trust in his promises.

Secondly, reflecting on the message of the cross. Jesus died for us, BUT he then rose up from the dead. Through his resurrection, if we ask for forgiveness for what we do wrong and believe that Jesus is God’s son, sent to save us, then we are assured that this life is not the end and we will have eternity with God and those whom we love. This is the Christian message of hope that gives meaning to our lives now. In John Ch 11 Jesus says **‘I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die and whoever lives by believing in me, will never die’**. It is also promised in Revelation, the last book of The Bible, **that a new earth will come, when God will put an end to death and there will be no more grief, or crying or pain**. This then is also the comfort that can be offered through the words, **‘happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them.’**

Thirdly, God offers us comfort in practical ways too. The bible tells us we should care for widows and orphans. How important then that our churches are welcoming and open to all who cross their threshold and that those who are grieving will find loving support, friendship and a listening ear, to help ease the despair and loneliness they may be feeling. Robin Prince Monroe, whose daughter died suddenly of leukaemia has written a book from which i quote **“God is big enough to take care of your grief too. He is strong enough and patient enough to pull you through. But more often than not, God uses other people to help us during difficult times. These other Christians become his very hands of healing and comfort.”** The aim of Farnham Bereavement Cafe, formerly known as Friends Together, is just for this. People can meet together to comfort and support one another and there are details at the back of the church if you would like to know more.

And finally, prayer – God wants us to pray, to cry out to him, sharing our thoughts and feelings, however angry, bleak or despairing. But we can feel so far from him when we are hurting. The young son of a close friend of mine died and she felt unable to pray. I told her that I and many others would be praying for her and her family. Years later she reflected on what a comfort this had been to her because though she felt a disconnect with God at the time, others were praying on her behalf and God heard those prayers. So my prayer is that through faith, we believe God walks with us in our sadness, and that we can be reassured Jesus’s words are true and personal to us **‘Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them.’** May God’s comfort draw us to him and may we be able to rejoice in the knowledge that not only does he love us, but he loves all those we are grieving for tonight.