We are here today, joined together in the common bond of grief to remember those for whom it was their time. In many ways the hardest part of grief, is the remembering of those who are gone from us, yet today we gather specifically to remember our loved ones, whether family of friend, neighbour or colleague.

None of us here today is alone. That statement may bring particular comfort to any who have come here today on their own. Although we grieve for different people, our grief is shared.

The time of grief and mourning can be an uncertain time, both in terms of its longevity and also in knowing how we or others will react. C.S. Lewis observed after the death of his wife that he was resentful if people asked him how he was as he often wanted to be alone in his thoughts and didn’t know how to even begin to answer the question, but he was just as resentful when people didn’t ask after him, observing that "no one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear."

Grief is, in one way, a costly consequence of love. My favourite music artist of all time is the Country Singer Garth Brooks. He has a song called the Dance. In this song the lyrics speak of our journey through life and love and loss as a Dance. I would like to share those lyrics with you:

Looking back on the memory of  
The dance we shared 'neath the stars above  
For a moment all the world was right  
How could I have known that you'd ever say goodbye

And now I'm glad I didn't know  
The way it all would end, the way it all would go  
Our lives are better left to chance  
I could have missed the pain  
But I'd have had to miss the dance

Holding you, I held everything  
For a moment wasn't I the king  
If I'd only known how the king would fall  
Hey, who's to say, you know I might have changed it all

And now I'm glad I didn't know  
The way it all would end, the way it all would go  
Our lives are better left to chance  
I could have missed the pain  
But I'd have had to miss the dance

We grieve because we feel the pain of loss, but we also grieve because of the strength of our love for the person that we have come here to remember today. That love continues and grief does not diminish it and often in the early months after death we feel that love even stronger than we did before. The only way we can avoid the pain of grief is by also avoiding the joy of love….refusing to dance.

And so, what brings us here ultimately today is not grief, but love – love for the person that has died, love that carries on in spite of their death, love that will carry on.

With love there is always hope, and the greatest love is the love of God for us. A love that never diminishes and never dies because it is the unconditional love of a father….THE father…the love of the Creator for his created children. In the words we have just heard from Paul’s letter to the Romans, he lists so many possible scenarios that could separate us from Gods love…..and concludes than none have the power to quench God’s love. Elsewhere throughout the bible we see many times Jesus explaining to his disciples, even though they don’t yet understand, that he must go away from them, that he must die, so that his work can be finished and so that the place can be prepared ahead for them…..and all of us…. in heaven.

Thomas has got to be my favourite of Jesus’ disciples….often called Doubting Thomas….he was always the disciple who was willing to ask the brave questions that the other disciples perhaps though foolish to ask. After hearing Jesus’ explain that he was going away and that they know the way, Thomas is willing to admit his ignorance and say, ‘I don’t know the way, but how can I know?’ Jesus’ answer is simple yet profound, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life.’ – There is hope for the future….and hope for you and I in our doubting and our questioning

The best answers to the big questions of life and death are to be found in the God who created us, the God who came to earth as Jesus to show us the way to return to him again, the God who goes ahead of us to prepare a place for us in eternity with him.

Today we are not alone. We meet together to share our grief, to share our love for those we have gathered together to remember, but we are here also in this building, this special holy place, a symbol of God’s love for each one of us, here or absent, a symbol of God’s desire to be deeply involved in each one of our lives.

The American poet, Robert Frost said, ‘In three words I can sum up everything I’ve learned about life: **it goes on**.’

God longs to be with us as our life goes on, as we continue the dance we share together beneath the stars above….God longs to show his love for us and to transform us….to renew us by the holy spirit, daily… to turn our sorrow into joy and our mourning into dancing.

Amen