

Sunday 5 November 2023, All Souls Requiem

John 5.19-25

The Revd Dr Evan McWilliams

The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.

The earth is desolate. Withered grass and leafless trees crackle and creak in the foreground while in the distance the sky is brightened orange by fire. An enormous armoured figure stands with one foot on the land and another in the sea. He is holding a pair of scales. High, high above him the air flutters with a thousand wings. There is a Great Silence. The Judge is about to ascend his throne.

Why have you come to church today? We have invited you to come to remember a loved one. To light a candle. To say a prayer. To hear Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine. But why have *you* come? Is it out of grief and hope? Is it out of regret and wishfulness? Is it because to come feels like doing *something* when in reality everything that can be done has already been done?

If you are tired, I understand. If you are unsettled, I know. If you are lost, I've been there. I bear my own departed on my heart tonight. They leave in us a Great Silence. And so often that Silence can be utterly deafening. What do you expect me to give you? Comfort? Peace of mind? Hope? Certainty about the future? I cannot give you those things. This beautiful church cannot give you those things. This service, poetic as it is, cannot give you those things. But the Judge; the Judge can give you those things.

The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.

Who is this Judge about to ascend his throne and open his books? Let me tell you about him. He was born long, long ago and laid between an ox and an ass. And though wrapped then in strips of cloth, he was from eternity wrapped in light as in a garment. He was a precocious child and a challenging man. But he never turned away anyone who came to him in honest need. He went from place to place and never had a home to call his own, though many hearts have since been his home. He looked down from a bloodstained throne and asked that those who put him there be forgiven. He was buried in the tomb of a rich man who he barely knew, but who loved him and tenderly washed and perfumed his body as it lay cold and still.

The Judge has opened his books. Names, so many names. So many leaves fallen from dry trees in the foreground and whirling through the air in the heat from the fire. He knows every. single. one. Not one is unfamiliar. Not one is strange to his ears. He has not forgotten the faces and the voices that prayed in simple trust at their bedside, 'Our Father who art in heaven.' Every aged forehead anointed with oil he remembers. Every blushing, youthful

cheek fading to pallid grey he remembers. Every frightened and wounded family holding each other for dear life he remembers. The merciful Judge weeps over those names.

The rich man's tomb could not contain him, he who fills the universe. The pangs of death could not maintain their grip on him, for he is the Lord of Life. The ancient serpent's poison could not long stop his Sacred Heart. He has passed to life eternal, and he holds the keys of Death and Hades.

The Father judges no one but has given all judgement to the Son, so that all may honour the Son just as they honour the Father.

What can I give you as you sit longingly here. As the world turns on towards winter? The loving Judge. I can give you him. I can point you to him. There he is! On his bloodstained earthly throne. The place where he paid the price of your freedom. There where his life poured out on the ground, that from the ground you might one day spring up alive as he did! There he is set in glory in the window above. Jesus the kindly Judge. Jesus the only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. Jesus who so loved the world that he gave himself for it.

So many names. And every one known by Jesus. Every one seen by Jesus. Every one loved by Jesus. What can He give you tonight? The same thing he offers to each of your departed loved ones: eternal life. His life, which is His alone to give. The Great Silence will not last forever. The scales of the Archangel Michael will not tilt against those who trust in Jesus. But the sound of rejoicing, of trumpets and cornets and strings, the sound of the sweetest angel voices in fair Jerusalem the Golden, city of green gardens and shining streets! That will last forever. And death's Silence will not drown it out. For the gentle Judge sits securely on his throne. And he knows your name.

Amen.