

SERMON

Given by Rev Mia Kyte Hilborn

Hospitaller, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust

2020 has been a year none of us are likely to forget. It's been life-changing for some with long-held expectations about work and family and friends challenged, for others it's been a time to stop and reflect, for some, working in health and social care, it has been extraordinarily busy and relentless, for others financial pressures have meant real hardships, losing their homes, and there's been food poverty which has been highlighted by Marcus Rashford. For some, lives are lived in fear and anxiety due to COVID, and for others this has been a year where they have lost someone they really loved.

Today, we remember those who've died, and we draw as close as we can in these socially distanced times, to those who are suffering in the midst of this confusing and difficult year.

We're commemorating both All Souls and All Saints, a time of remembrance for those who've touched our lives, whose good memories will stay with us, when the little and the great saints are brought to mind. Saints are those whose lives in some way reflect the power of God in the world, maybe they brought sacred gifts of food or joy, care, compassion, courage or kindness. It could be skill, it could be art. The world was a better place because of them. This is the beginning of the Church's season of remembrance, and at the beginning we recall the heroes and heroines of everyday life as well as the famous saints of history.

Memories are kept alive in the hearts of those who live and the Bible reading and the anthem spoke of the reality of pain and suffering and tears, but says that in these times these things are going to come to an end. We're never left without hope even in the midst of such darkness, although we may find it hidden due to being overwhelmed by these bad things.

The promise is, that death will be no more, that crying and pain will be no more, for these things have passed away.

This is glorious news indeed and it may benefit us to re-remember it, as part of our particular tribute to those who've died, so that we still have hope as we live on in honour of those who've gone before.

This year, in my work as a chaplain at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals and for the London Fire Brigade, I have seen extraordinary acts of compassion and kindness, above and beyond what you'd expect. I've witnessed real heroes and heroines who have worked in intensive care units, an emergency department, on a ward, in a fire station. I've seen firefighters who've been expanding their skill sets by supporting paramedics and still fighting fires and keeping London safe. I've seen doctors and nurses and therapists and chaplains being utterly selfless in the work that they've done. I've seen workers across the hospital just give their all, and they're still doing it, because the pandemic has not yet finished. And most patients do recover and most patients go well home, but I've done too many funerals, too many this year.

Jesus said, 'I am the Alpha and the Omega' the beginning and the end'. Life is a gift, the light that was at our beginning will be at our end, at our departing. The hope we have in our hearts as Christians is eternal. So this day we remember with love and with respect those who have gone before us, giving honour to their names and respect for their lives for our continuing to live with hope. Hope that is in Christ will not be disappointed.

In my work this year I've been privileged to be alongside some of the finest clinical staff in the country, to have sat by bedsides of the sick and the dying, including those who've died of COVID and be truly humbled by patients' humour, honesty and faith. The saints of today continue to amaze and move us: the commitment of emergency and charity personnel, some truly outstanding works of service by local churches and other faith based organisations in willingness to arrange feeding programmes, help for the destitute the homeless, care and virtual companionship for those who are isolated and vulnerable. And for religious leaders joining chaplaincy teams at the height of the pandemic, just as the Archbishop of Canterbury joined Guy's and St Thomas'. A huge thank you to them all.

We look to the past to remember, but we are the shapers of the future, preparing for those generations that will come after us. We are held within the arms of the loving Jesus Christ, Alpha and Omega, we're kept safe for life here and for eternal life beyond.