There are some words that stay with us long after they have been spoken.

After 49 years of marriage, my Oma placed a photograph of my Opa on display. Underneath it, she wrote a poem about their life together. It spoke about two people who had walked through life side by side, sharing the storms as well as the beautiful days, each becoming a source of strength and comfort for the other.

Today, on All Saints' Sunday, we remember the people who have walked beside us. We remember those we love and those we have had to say goodbye to. And we remember how deeply their absence can be felt.

Today, we remember Bill Johnson, Tod Deal, and Jim Furgeson. They were part of our community, and they leave behind family and friends who will miss them.

And these three men are not the only ones we carry in our hearts today. There are many other names, many other faces, many other stories of love and loss. Their names and their stories belong here, too. Later in this service, they will also have their place.

For each of us, grief is different. Sometimes it comes in waves. Sometimes it is there quietly in the background, and then suddenly something reminds us of the person we have lost: a photograph, a familiar song, an empty chair, or a moment when we instinctively want to share something with them.

And sometimes grief begins before we have lost someone.

When someone we love is seriously ill, when a person is fighting for their life, we find ourselves living between hope and fear. We hope that everything will be all right. We pray that this person will stay with us. And at the same time, we are afraid of what might happen.

We wait for news. We may lie awake at night, wondering what the future will bring. We may find ourselves asking questions we are not ready to face.

Recently, someone said to me, “I am not ready to let her go.”

I think many of us understand those words.

Even when we believe in eternal life, even when we trust that our loved ones are held in God's hands, we may not be ready to let them go. We want more time. We want another conversation, another hug, another ordinary day together.

And that is not a failure of faith. It is an expression of love.

We can believe in the resurrection and still be afraid of losing someone. We can pray and still feel uncertain. We can trust God and still ask God to let the person we love remain with us.

There is room for all of that in our faith.

In today's Gospel, Jesus speaks words of blessing. He says:

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

These words are at the heart of our gathering today.

Jesus speaks a blessing over those who mourn. He sees those who are hurting. He sees the tears that others may never notice, the empty spaces left by those who have died, and the fear we carry when someone we love may not be with us much longer.

And he promises comfort.

Sometimes that comfort comes through the words of Scripture or through prayer. Sometimes it comes when someone sits beside us and listens without trying to fix anything. Sometimes it comes through a friend who remembers the name of the person we have lost, or through a community that continues to walk with us long after the funeral is over.

We cannot take away one another's grief. But we can be there for each other. We can listen, we can sit in silence, and we can offer strength when someone else has none left.

And even when we cannot find comfort, even when God seems far away and our prayers are no more than a whispered "Please, God," we are not beyond the reach of God's love.

The Be-atitudes remind us that God's blessing is not reserved for people whose lives are easy or whose hearts are free from sorrow. God draws near to us in the very places where we are hurting.

As Christians, we also hold on to the hope of eternal life. We trust that those who have died are held in God's care. We trust that death does not have the final word, and that God's love is stronger than death.

vcbgfvWe do not know everything about what lies beyond this life. But we trust the One who has promised to be with us, in life and in death.

And so, today, we remember. We grieve. We give thanks for the lives of those we have loved. We hold on to hope, even when that hope feels fragile.

My Oma wrote beneath the photograph of my Opa: “One was the strength of the other, one was the comfort of the other.”

How precious it is to have someone who walks beside us through life. And how painful it is when that person is no longer there.

We cannot take away one another’s pain. But we can be there for each other. We can listen, sit in silence, and give one another strength when our own strength is not enough.

And we may find comfort in our faith, in Jesus Christ, and in the love of the people who walk beside us, trusting in the hope that one day we will all be reunited in God’s love.

Amen.