It is good to be here with you and to share in this special Service. Words seem so pathetically inadequate in the face of the grief you live with and all I can do is offer you a few thoughts which you may or may not find helpful.

Many years ago I had a telephone call from a Vicar in the north of England. He told me the tragic story of a little boy who had been run over and killed on his way to school. After the funeral the child’s mother came to church every Sunday. Her husband would drive her there and then go on to a place which had become very special to him, a place where he and his little son had spent many happy hours fishing. The Vicar was worried. Wasn’t this morbid, unhealthy, to be returning week by week to this place where this father would sit alone with his memories and his grief? I do not remember now what I said but I hope it was something to reassure the Vicar that probably this man was doing the very best possible thing for him.

Years later a friend told me of a custom among Red Indians. A Red Indian man, when he is bereaved, will go into the forest and choose a tree, he will then hit the tree several times with an axe, making a deep wound in the tree. This tree then becomes the man’s special place. He identifies the wound in the tree with his own grief. The tree becomes a focus for his grief and whenever he feels the need he will return to the tree simply to be quiet, or to weep or to remember his loved one who has died. Each time he visits he is confronted by the wound in the tree which reminds him of the deep wound in himself. As time goes by he sees the wound in the tree begin to heal, the sap dries up, and the tree continues to grow, its leaves bud in the spring and die off in the autumn. Despite the wound which has marked the tree for ever, it continues to grow ... life goes on. Slowly the Indian begins to heal, certainly the mark remains and he will never be the same again, but his life goes on, the seasons come and go and he continues to grow.

What happens here in this cathedral is what happens to the Red Indian when he visits his wounded tree. You are confronted with your brokenness. The death of someone you love
so much marks you very deeply, you are never the same again. As time goes by the people around you – friends, neighbours, people you work with, even relatives, begin to forget. You will never forget and maybe it is important to have occasions like this. I do not think *remembrance* Service is the right word but I struggle to find another. You do not need reminding, you will never forget, but it is a place and a space where you can focus your memories.

Some years ago I came across a poem entitled The Heavy Stone. It was written by a woman who worked in the adult hospice in Oxford.

*The Heavy Stone*

*My grief was a heavy stone,*  
*rough and sharp.*  
*Grasping to pick it up*  
*my hands were cut.*

*Afraid to let it go*  
*I carried it.*  
*While I had my grief*  
*you were not lost.*

*The rain of my tears*  
*smoothed it.*  
*The wind of my rage*  
*weathered it,*  
*making it round and small.*

*The cuts in my hands have healed.*  
*now in my palm it rests,*  
*sometimes almost beautiful,*  
*sometimes almost you.*

*Averil Stedeford*
Of one thing I am sure, your love for your children who have died will never grow less. Your love grows ever deeper as time goes by. I have even begun to believe that the eternal life which your children now live in all its fullness and freedom is not a million trillion miles away. I believe that eternal life is deep, deep in you, in your very being. Your child will for all eternity will be a part of you. Nothing can separate you.

We hold you in our hearts and in our prayers. God be with you.