

Life – and death?

I love showing children from schools and uniformed groups around our churches. I start by saying churches are all about life and death. You come through the graveyard reminding us of death, but that Christians believe that's not the end as there is new life in heaven. We come inside to the font. A place where we go under the water to die forgiven to the old life and rise washed clean and refreshed to new life in Christ. We approach the Communion Table where bread and wine remind us of Jesus body broken and blood shed when He died on the cross for us, but He was raised again from the dead for everlasting life.

We all struggle with both life and death. Life itself is tough and pressured. We wish our time away hoping things will get better. And we cannot quite cope with death being the end of this life. That we leave this life and go to another place. The popular poem often read at funerals 'Death is nothing at all' was written by a former Dean of St Pauls in London, but is often misunderstood. For Christians, death is nothing at all, because Jesus has conquered the old power of sin and death by His death on the cross, bringing us forgiveness, and being raised to life again conquering the power of death for us all.

But 'death is nothing at all' doesn't mean death doesn't matter. Death is a terrible reality we all face after this life. We've all known bereavements especially during this pandemic. Death brings a great and powerful, and terrible separation. And yet we pretend it's not really a separation. I lead many funerals where people talk of the deceased's spirit still living on with us. Or they 'address' the deceased as if they are still here and listening and watching us, even though we can't see them.

But there is hope after death. The Christian faith teaches us that by faith and trust in Jesus we can receive the free gift of eternal life in heaven for ever after this life. But we have to leave this life to obtain that great prize. And it is so hard for those of us left behind without those who have died.

God in His love and care draws close to us and comforts us and strengthens us to face the future without our deceased loved ones by the power of His Holy Spirit. When we feel a presence with us when we have been bereaved, it is God Himself who comes alongside us. When you are bereaved (as sadly we all will be at some time), remember that God by His Holy Spirit comes alongside you to comfort and strengthen you to face a tough future. We may not always feel it, but we can trust in a loving God who is always with us. We can leave our loved ones confidently in God's safekeeping. It is very hard to let go, and we never forget our loved ones and we must always thank God for them. But we know and trust that God is always with us to support, care, strengthen and comfort us, and will somehow give us the strength to go on.

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