

What happens when you die!

Isaiah 25⁶⁻⁹; Psalm 24¹⁻⁶; Revelation 21^{1-a}; John 11³²⁻⁴⁴

Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God? [John 11⁴⁰]

For this morning I thought I would address something basic to our faith and respond to the question, 'What happens when we die?'

However much you want it, the life that we experience now will not last for ever! Even Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead, only experienced a temporary resurrection - he certainly isn't alive today!

So, two things:

✠ Our life, now and into the future, is with God.

John records an honest question from Mary, **Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?** This isn't doubt but it is an aspiration and one that we all associate with at some level. We want to be like Woody Allen, who said, *I don't want to achieve immortality through my work; I want to achieve immortality through not dying. I don't want to live on in the hearts of my countrymen; I want to live on in my apartment.*

John records the summary of our Christian hope in the Revelation: **Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them;**

It doesn't matter where we are, we are in God and God is in us. It is this apocalyptic image of God descending from heaven to earth to live there. Yet, this is John trying to describe a vision and, whilst he is inspirational, it is limited.

My belief, my hope is that dying is not the end but a continuation. That at the moment of death we slip from time into timelessness (which is where God lives) and so we are immediately in his presence. Those who have attended Parish funerals here will know that I almost always use the illustration of birth. We live for 9 months in the womb and then burst into this world. We were in the womb being prepared for this world and yet consciously remember nothing about it. So it is with our birth into the life that God has for us after this one.

There is nothing to fear for we go from God to God.

✠ When we grieve, we do so as those who have hope and will be comforted

Isaiah says: **he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,**

John says in Revelation, **he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'**

Mary says to Jesus, **Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.'** This follows the great I am statement from Jesus when he says I am the resurrection and the life those who believe in my shall never die.

Sadness, pain, anger, disbelief - these things are all natural and should never be discouraged and people do not move through grief at anything like a uniform speed or progress. Yet, grieve as we will, we do not grieve as those who have no hope! God holds us until we become aware that he is holding us and he deals with our tears until they can become smiles again.

If the Church is silent on death and how we cope with it, we have to surrender to the increasingly popular and grotesque celebration of Halloween: a festival that masquerades as a harmless bit of dressing up but caricatures the demonic and is devoid of hope.