



St John's Cathedral 聖公會聖約翰座堂

Anglican Diocese of Hong Kong Island
Hong Kong Sheng Kung Hui

Message of Hope: Life is changed, not taken away!

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Hello everyone!

My name is Fr Robert Martin. I'm one of the chaplains here at St John's Cathedral and I'm, also the Priest in Charge of Emmanuel Church, Pokfulam.

One of the most humbling privileges in the ministry of a priest is to walk alongside those who have lost a loved one and help them to find some hope in the personal tragedy they are experiencing. Over the last week I have been walking with 3 families who have lost loved ones. Each family is different and, yet, they are faced with the same feelings of loss and hopelessness.

One of the scripture texts that I find inspiring is from St Paul's 1st letter to the Thessalonians – these are words of hope.

'We want you to be quite certain, brethren, about those who have fallen asleep, to make sure that you do not grieve for them, as others do who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that in the same way God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.'

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 NJB

When someone we love dies we often ask the question what can we do? We feel a deep sense of loss and hopelessness in the face of physical death and can be overwhelmed by sadness. But as St Paul reminds us in the reading above, we are a people of hope, not despair. Don't get me wrong, the pain of death is real and truly pierces the heart but that pain is undergirded by the hope that we have in Christ – the hope that in death life is changed, not taken away. Not a fairy tale or wishful thinking, or something the clergy tells you on a sad day to cheer you up, but a truth that has strengthened believers for over two thousand years. This is the faith of the Saints. This is the faith we believe and live out in our daily lives.

So as followers of Christ how are we to respond to the great mystery of death? Well, I believe that there are two great truths that we can proclaim even in our time of sorrow.

Firstly, we proclaim that life is a precious gift from God – so let us smile and give thanks for the lives of those who have died. Thanking God for all the memories we have of them and how their lives have touched our lives. For the contribution they made over the years to each one of us personally. For the love we saw in them and which they generously shared with us. For all these things - **Thanks be to God!**

Secondly, we proclaim that our loved ones are safe in God's care and that we are joined with them in that great fellowship of prayer and praise - the Communion of Saints. Our funeral liturgy assures us that *'in death, life is changed not taken away'*. So let us continue to surround our loved ones with our love and prayers, commending them to God, in the hope that their lives continue in a new and fuller and better way with him. And let us commend them to our loving Father, saying simply;
'Goodbye, God bless you, have a safe journey, until we meet again'.

The great Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey, once said that praying for others was simply - *'going into the presence of God with people on our hearts'*.

I'd like to share with you a lovely prayer that was written by Fr Bede Jarrett, a Dominican priest who served in the First World War, and died in 1934. He prayed these words:

**We give them back to you, dear God,
who gave them first to us.
Yet as you did not lose them in giving,
so we have not lost them by their returning.
Not as the world gives, do you give, O Lover of Souls!
What you give, you do not take away.
For what is yours is ours always, if we are yours.
Life is eternal; and love is immortal;
and death is only an horizon;
and an horizon is nothing but the limit of our sight.
Lift us up, strong Son of God, that we may see further;
cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly;
draw us closer to yourself that we may know ourselves
nearer to our beloved who are with you.
And while you prepare a place for us,
prepare us for that happy place,
that where they are, and you are, we too may be;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

So brothers and sisters, when we are faced with tragedy and that ultimate challenge of death, may our eyes always look beyond the horizon and may our hearts always be full of hope.

God bless you all.