

“So that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope” 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 13

As a minister for 20 years, I have taken many funerals and seen many people grieving. The first one I took was that of a young farmer. He had taken his own life during the foot and mouth crisis. To add to his despair, his engagement had ended. The church was packed, as it usually is when one so young passes away. The most poignant have been those who have died in infancy. One, carried into church in a small white coffin by his father, was especially moving.

People have dealt with the passing of their loved ones in many different ways, some in inconsolable weeping, others more quietly. But there is one clearly noticeable difference between the funerals of those who have been believers in Christ and those who have not.

Without exception the funerals of people who have been followers of Christ have had an atmosphere of authentic rejoicing as well as genuine mourning for loss. Some have even been characterised by a good deal of laughter mixed with the tears.

Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that he wants them to be informed about what will happen to their believing loved ones who have died, in order that their grieving will be different from that of those who have no hope for any kind of life beyond the death of the body. We might assume that he means that they will go to heaven and stay there forever, but he doesn't. They will go to heaven, but Paul's point is that, when Jesus returns, they will be raised from the dead to return with him, and “be with him forever.”

Jesus reassured his disciples “You have sorrow now. But I will see you again. Your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy from you.”

That's a bit more robust than the world's rather vague, fanciful comforts that their departed loved ones have become angels, or stars in the sky, or the wistfully expressed sentiment that they will one day meet again and simply take up where they left off. If we trust Jesus, then we will meet again, but it will be in a kind existence as different from the one we know on this earth as living in the world is different from being a baby in the womb. We will move on, not to a continuation of this present life, but to a different kind of life altogether.

So the sadness of loss for a Christian is always softened by the joy of knowing that the one we have lost is now living, in ultimate perfection, a life infinitely more active and abundant than the one they lived on earth.

Prayer

Father, thank you again for the hope of our faith. Thank you that for us death is not the end of life, but a passing from one kind of life to another, and that because of this our grieving does not leave us in despair. We bless you for the lives of Christians departed, and we look forward to the time when we will see them, and you, again. In Jesus' name, amen.

All these devotionals can be found on our website inghamitechurch.org on the 'Resources' page. Click on the link to go there.