

## Funerals

One of the worst experiences in life is when someone you love dies. It is here at the most painful moment we find that Jesus can offer the most comfort, hope and love. Death is a central feature of the Christian faith, because it is the finality of death which Jesus came to undo, to offer us new life, eternal life, with him once we have passed on.

When families come to us for the funeral service of their loved ones we seek to provide whatever support and comfort we can, and will help you through the service arrangements, ensuring the final moments with your loved one are precious and enable you to say goodbye and let them rest in peace.

At Pennington Church we are very experienced at walking with people through grief. Of course there are our clergy who will support you and conduct the funeral service, but beyond that we also have a team of bereavement visitors who will be happy to come and simply talk with you over a cup of tea to keep you company and provide a listening and friendly ear. Once a year we have a memorial service when we recall those who have died, recently or sometime in the more distant past.

Everyone is welcome but we try to plan this service to include reading out the names of those who have died. So please do contact us before hand if you intend to come and would like your loved one's names included. Finally we have a Book or Remembrance which is always displays the people who have died in a particular month. This book is kept in a display cabinet on the way out of church as a constant reminder of those we have known and loved over the years.

{mospagebreak title=When Someone Dies}

What happens when someone dies? - Practically

There are two different ways of talking about this - practically and spiritually. Here we're going to talk about the practical concerns of what we do when someone dies. Later on we'll talk about the spiritual side of things. When someone dies in our parish the first we hear of it is normally via the Funeral Director who calls us to ask if we will handle the funeral.

We are normally very happy to do so as long as the person or the person's family live in the parish. Anyone who lives in our parish is entitled to a church funeral, not just those who have been baptised or those who worshipped regularly with us. However, the service we provide is very clearly and strongly Christian at every funeral we conduct. It is therefore often the case that those who were not Christian's choose to have their funeral elsewhere.

When we are invited to conduct a service though we will take all the details we need from the Funeral Director and then make contact directly with the family to arrange a visit. When one of the clergy from Pennington Church visit the next of kin it is sometimes helpful to have a few other close family or friends present too so we can build up a good picture of who the person was that has died and get to know folk a little too.

At this visit we will talk to you about all sorts of things and sort the whole funeral service out with you. We'll guide you through the service and the hymns you may or may not want to sing. We'll make sure you've had a chance to ask for any special elements within the service and of course we'll spend a lot of time just listening to your memories and reflections on who this person was that you now miss. We will especially ask if there any pictures you have of your loved one. We will often create an order of service with the hymns etc on and it nice to have a picture on the front cover of it. If this isn't possible Although we can of course speak on your behalf about your loved one we are always delighted when a family member or close friend can say something themselves at the funeral service. It is a difficult thing to do for many people but it does offer a much more personal reflection than a clergyman can achieve. If this isn't possible we may ask you to write something that we could read on your behalf at the service. When the meeting is complete we will want to pray with you. When the meeting is complete we will want to pray with you. If we are creating an order of service, then we will want you to look through the draft before it is produced, to check that all the information is correct.

On the day, we will meet you at the church and conduct the service in the way we've all agreed and we will offer the orders of service for people to keep as a reminder after the service is over. If you would like one of the clergy to attend the reception after the service, we would be happy to do so, but would need to be asked before the day, because often there are other things that get booked into our diaries after the service and we would need to set aside more time.

After the service we have a small team of visitors who will contact you about 3 weeks to a month after the service to ask if you would like someone to come round and listen to you. They are church people who have been trained to listen in this area. They are not trained 'counsellors', but are there to here how you are getting on. If you are in deeper need they will be able to put you in contact with more professional help.

{mospagebreak title=Popular Hymns} Popular hymns

Abide with Me

The Lord's My Shepherd

Make me a channel of Your peace

The day Thou gavest Lord is ended

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder (How great Thou art)

The King of love my shepherd is

We can play and sing anything you would like as funeral hymns, though there are some that are more appropriate than others. We will discuss with you what you would like

{mospagebreak title=Bible Readings} A Selection of Bible Readings

Here's a selection of Bible readings which are suitable for a funeral service.

If the vicar is doing the Funeral service then he will talk to you and then pray and decide which readings he will use. They may not be directly related to the funeral, but they will be related to the person who has died and their character. He will discuss this with you.

Here are a few passages that are often used at funeral services:

Isaiah 65:17-25

John 14:1-7

1 Corinthians 15:12-19; and 50-58

Revelation 21:1-7

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

John 11:17-35

1 Corinthians 15:3-11

1 Corinthians 15:20-27

{mospagebreak title=The Order of Service}

## The Order of Service

As we have said, we often, though not always, produce an order of service. We will discuss this thoroughly with you. We would like it to be as personal as we can all make it. This may not be easy, but we are sure that it is the best way in the end. It helps you to feel that you have 'done what you can', and it makes everyone at the service remember the personal more clearly. It helps to draw out some of the pain with thanksgiving and memory.

Here is a draft order of service which might be adapted:

We hope that together we can create something which will be a positive memory of this difficult day, for years to come.

{mospagebreak title=What happens spiritually?} What Happens to someone when they die? - Spiritually

When someone dies it is natural to begin to wonder what has happened. Most people have some belief in eternal life, still in this country. There are many, of course, who believe simply that we are flesh and blood and when we die, that is it, the end of that flesh and blood and so the end of that person's existence completely.

As Christians we know that we are more than just flesh and blood though. We are spirit too. It is our spirit which responds to God in life and it is our spirit which continues to exist after we die. But more than that, Jesus promised too that we would enjoy not just a spiritual life for eternity, but also that we would enjoy new bodies too! There's a great passage in John's gospel (John 14:1-6) and this is worth looking at yourself if you have a Bible. It speaks about lots of things, but here are few which might help.

It was spoken by Jesus as He was preparing to leave His disciples. It is as though Jesus was getting them ready for His departure, in the same way that we have lost someone; the disciples were going to lose their Friend and Master. Jesus was saying to them; here are some words that will help you in the future, hold on to them.

It was spoken to allay our fears (verse 1); Jesus says, 'let not your heart be troubled'. Death is not the end for the Christian, there is something much more glorious awaiting them.

It was spoken to bolster our faith (verse 1). This is often a time when faith is tested and we wonder what is happening to our lives; Jesus says, 'believe in God, believe also in me'. It is through difficult times that faith can be strengthened and can strengthen our lives. Often people say to us, 'you know I don't know how I would have coped without God. He has kept me and helped me through this difficult time. That can be your experience too if you let Jesus into your life to help you.

It was spoken to show that there is room for all (verse 2). Jesus says, 'in my Father's house there are many dwelling places'. There is room for all in the Kingdom of God and He is waiting with His arms wide open to accept us.

It was spoken to prepare the way for us through this difficult time (verse 2, 3) Jesus says he is going to prepare a place

and will come to meet us. This is a real comfort to us; He will be there welcoming us into His heavenly mansion.

It was spoken to show the way into the blessings God offers to all. Jesus said, 'I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.' He is there waiting for us, but not all accept His offer of joy and freedom and salvation. To them the offer is open, but rejected, either explicitly when people turn away from Jesus, or implicitly by the way that they ignore His offer of life. They may not directly oppose him, but they just quietly put Him on one side and forget about Him, until sometimes it is too late.

We may not know what our loved one thought, or believed about Jesus, but God knows all things and His wisdom is perfect; His power is infinite and so He knows exactly where we all stand before Him; it is the difference between life and death to Him. We can only stand before God for ourselves, not for others. So the question comes back to us. Where do we stand before God? Or put it starkly as one Christian group used to, 'If you were to die tonight, what good reason is there that God should allow you into His heaven? The answer to this can only be found in John 14:6; because of trust in Jesus alone for salvation - there is no other way.

{mospagebreak title=There is no second chance after we die?}

Is there no second chance after we die?

Sometimes we try to cling to every straw of hope and say that perhaps there will be another chance for them after death. Maybe they will be given a second opportunity to turn to God and be accepted by Him. If God is a God of love would He really keep this person I love away from His presence? We would all like to say this, but we cannot do so if we look at the Bible. There are many examples where the Bible teaches that there are no second chances after death. Imagine someone driving over the edge of a cliff and as they are sailing over the edge saying to themselves, 'maybe I'll get another chance to put my foot on the breaks. In fact I'll do that now - surely that will help?' The answer, as we all know; it is just too late.

The Bible is very clear in a number of places, for example:

Hebrews 9:27 'it is appointed for men to die once, and after this comes judgement'.

2 Corinthians 5:10 'for we must appear before the judgement seat of Christ'

Perhaps the clearest example is that by Jesus Himself in the story of the Rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Jesus speaks of 2 men who died one went to be with God, and the other did not. The whole point of the parable is that there was no second chance for the man who was not with God, no matter how he pleaded. It was too late for any change to take place. All the more reason that times like bereavement make us reassess the realities of life and death. They cause us to ask the question - "Where do we stand before a God who loves us and waiting with outstretched arms to accept us?"

{mospagebreak title=Jesus loves us}

Jesus loves us and wants to put His arms of love around us.

Let us end,where we began. At Christ Church we want you to know the love of Jesus to help you and strengthen you at this difficult time. There may be lots of questions, and we cannot answer them all, not would it be possible to, but we can assure you that God's love is reaching out to you, and He wants to help you, to heal you and to draw you to Himself.

This is an opportunity for you to come to a deeper understanding of God's love for you, through this difficult time in your life.

We pray that Christ Church will be able to help with that journey. Please feel free to contact us.