

Dean's Letter, May 7 2017

Dear Cathedral family

Somebody asked me recently, "What do Christians believe about the after-life?" A good question! Where do we begin to answer that one?

The two occasions when I am made most aware of our belief in life beyond death, are at a deathbed – when someone is dying – and at a funeral. On both occasions our Christian faith points us to another dimension, life beyond the grave.

For Christians, death is the gate of paradise. We believe that God is with us even in the dark valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23); that the eternal God is our refuge; that even though we die in this world, we shall be raised to life in the world to come; that the angels will lead us "to those heavenly places where those who rest in Christ will have everlasting joy"[1].

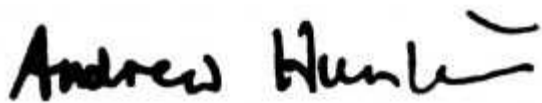
When we die in Christ, we "go forth on our journey from this world, in the name of the almighty Father who created us, in the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for us, in the name of the Holy Spirit who strengthens us, in communion with the holy apostles, confessors and martyrs, and all the blessed saints, and aided by angels and archangels and all the armies of the heavenly host". We enter "into the new Jerusalem, the abode of peace, and dwell with God for ever.[2]"

Those who live and die with Christ share in His death and resurrection. Death "marks ... a stage in the journey towards the fullness of eternal life with the risen Lord (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)"[3]. The faithful departed will be revealed as God's children when Christ returns. As we say in the Apostles Creed, "I believe in the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."[4]

After death, our bodies are buried or cremated "in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ who died, was buried, and rose again for us."[5] And the Catechism reminds us of our assurance as Christians, "that nothing, not even death, shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord"[6] – a reference to Romans 8:38-39.

Grief and sorrow is very real. Our Christian faith does not diminish this or allow us to somehow avoid or escape the reality of loss. We are not shielded from suffering or tragedy. We are not living in some sort of spiritual bubble that keeps us from harm – although we do pray and trust for protection in the midst of danger. But when we are crushed by events, by the death of a loved one, by tragedy, by the forces of evil, we do look to the Lord for strength and hope and courage, for light in the midst of darkness. Death is the end of this life as we know it. But it is also the beginning of the perfect life with God beyond the grave.

My love to you all

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Hunter". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

[1] *An Anglican Prayer Book (AAPB) 1989*, pg 521

[2] *AAPB 1989*, pg 522

[3] *AAPB 1989*, pg 525

[4] *AAPB 1989*, PG 59

[5] *AAPB 1989*, pg 542

[6] *AAPB 1989*, pg 444