

## Grief and Loss

On Tuesday I attended a course on ministry to the bereaved. Having been involved in conducting funerals and in the meetings with bereaved relatives beforehand it was good to have the opportunity to learn from the insights and experience of others.

I found it particularly helpful to learn about the process of grieving and loss that psychologists and others have been able to identify and analyse. Of course each of us are likely to react differently to the loss of a loved one but I imagine we may all recognize at least some of the stages in the grieving process.

There may be the initial shock and numbness, even when the death is expected. Our feelings may be very confused, encompassing guilt or even denial. At least at the beginning there may be practical things to sort out which keep our minds otherwise occupied. Hopefully we will come to accept the loss and adjust to it. Though that may take a long time and in some cases not really be achieved.

What we are talking about there, linking to our special focus here at St Martin's, is surely inner peace and reconciliation. Both allow us to move on in our lives, to truly live. It may mean new activities, new interests, new friends.

However, the grieving process affects not only those who lose a loved one close to them but can also affect a whole community, even a whole nation. We saw that with the death of Princess Diana, and more recently with a number of cases in the sporting world. And let us not forget those parts of the world racked by conflict and violence where cruel death is a daily occurrence.

The one certainty in life is death. And yet most of us shy away from talking about it. In earlier generations without today's medical advances where survival rates were far lower there was arguably a more realistic and practical approach to death. The support networks within a community were also arguably stronger.

Yet for the Christian death is not the end but rather a new beginning. A funeral should be a time not just of grieving but of hope, as we heard in our Bible reading just now from the book of Revelation (Revelation 21.1-5). We believe that God shares in our pain, our grief, our suffering. And the sign of that is the cross on which Jesus died and bore our sorrows. Through our Lord's resurrection we believe that death will indeed be no more, that mourning and crying and pain will indeed be no more. That is the message we are called to share and make known wherever there is suffering or conflict.

Kingsley Boulton  
15<sup>th</sup> February 2019