



Pastoral Care & Nurture: Bereavement

1. Christian Reactions to Death

The Church of England says this about death and funerals:

Funeral services always raise profound questions about the meaning of life and death. Jesus himself believed in a life-giving God: 'the God of the living, not of the dead.' Christians believe that Christ's resurrection is the triumph of good over evil and of life over death and has made eternal life available to us.

All through history, Christian doctrine has wrestled with the mysteries which are known as the Four last things: heaven, hell, death and judgement. We know that everybody will be judged by God and the relationship between God's love and His judgement and mercy is one of the constant themes of Christian writing.

What heaven is like, none of us dare say too precisely but we know that we shall delight in the presence and love of God and of the whole company of heaven. Whatever is wonderful about life here on earth is only a glimpse of the glory of the life that is to come.

Most Christians would describe hell as separation from that love of God. The separation is never what God wants, it is our own responsibility.

What happens after we die remains a mystery. Some Anglicans believe in Christ's continuing power beyond death to cleanse us of our sins and bring us into the closer presence of God. That is why those of the more Catholic tradition pray for those who are dead.

Evangelical Anglicans, who emphasise that eternal life depends on decisions of faith taken in this world, see no justification in the New Testament for such prayers with regard to those who have died, apart from prayers of thanksgiving.