

The way to go

30 10 09

My text may be found in John chapter 14 and verse 4: 'You know the way'.

A memorial service is a chance to remember and to say goodbye. I should like to thank Paul and Beverley for their personal and powerful evocations of a man we both knew and liked and loved. Theirs were indeed loving portraits of Michael who with his smile and cheerful disposition was an integral part of the life of our church for over a decade. Since Paul and Beverley have given us pictures of the man, I'm free to focus, albeit briefly, on the life we lead and on the life of the world to come.

One major difference between us and the dogs that Michael and Diana made part of their home is self-awareness, an awareness of who we are and what we are; the fact that we are mortal and that we will all, sooner or later, one day die. Death is a necessary fact of life and it is hard to come to terms with that fact: that one day I shall cease to be. Perhaps it is the death of a pet whose life span is so much shorter than ours that first alerts us to the reality of death and the possibility of death. There is an understandable fear and pain that we and that those we love will not last for ever. Part of the process of growing up is coming to terms with our own mortality. Part of what it is to love is to feel grief when we are separated from someone who for so long has been an essential part of our lives.

Religions have this in common: that life does not end in death. Religions may differ in detail about the afterlife but they share a belief in the life to come. Christianity is not exceptional in this respect but what is unique to our faith is the belief that God was born into the world he created in the person of his Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ; that the baby born at Christmas, as a man died painfully on a cross on Good Friday. But the story does not end with the tomb in which his body was laid to rest for on Easter Day, Mary Magdalene found the stone rolled away and the tomb empty except for his folded grave clothes. For a Christian, each Sunday is a celebration of the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave and with it comes the promise that as God' children, we will have eternal life when as individuals we are each raised from the dead.

My text is a simple statement by Jesus to his disciples: 'You know the way'. Jesus is comparing our lives to a journey. Our destination is to reach his Father's house in which there are many mansions, many dwelling places where we will be reunited with those we love. Jesus has been the disciples' constant companion during his three year public ministry but now on his way to Jerusalem, he is aware of his imminent death which will separate him bodily from his friends. But they are not lost without him; they know the way to go. That way is in fact to follow in his steps, the truth of the way to live this life. We can live our lives confident in the knowledge that our hope is in the life to come, our faith is in the resurrection from the dead, our belief is in a God who knows us and loves us and wants us to be in a living relationship with him both now and for all eternity.

Of course, it is sad that Michael has died and we have rightly come here this afternoon to pay our respects to his memory and show our love for his wife Diana. To grieve and to mourn for those we love and have lost is perfectly natural but the light of Christ can and will dispel the darkness of death.

This is our faith and in this we can trust.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Memorial service for Michael Wilson

St Bartholomew's Dinard

30th October, 2009

H: Sermon 21: The Way to go

