



REFLECT:

Stimulus exploration of the Christian narrative with which to think together

“We are only persons with each other: our humanity is ‘co-humanity’, inextricably involved with others, utterly relational, both in our humanity and our shared life on a finite planet. So education needs to have a core focus on relationships and commitments, participation in communities and institutions, and the qualities of character that enable people to flourish together.”

(Church of England Vision for Education, 2016)

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”

(John 13.34)



In Luke 24.13-35, we read the account of the resurrected Jesus and his interactions with some of his followers. The teacher and healer who they had known intimately, loved deeply and followed devotedly had been killed. The community they knew was torn apart, desolate and broken. The narrative focuses on two grieving friends walking together to Emmaus - the walk must have been a shaky one; disorientated and stumbling; numbed by trauma. Although they don't recognise him, Jesus walks with the two friends, journeying alongside them in their confusion and grief. In Caravaggio's iconic painting of the *Supper at Emmaus*, we catch a glimpse of the impact of Jesus' presence. When those gathered finally realise who is among them, Caravaggio sets a scene where there is a palpable sense of emotion and drama. A moment of realisation, of a community coming together and finding their first steps forward out of the darkness and doubt.

In every age, death has presented humankind with one of its greatest challenges. Indeed, the history books remind us of stories of deep and lasting grief – even in times where mortality was much more real than it is to us in 21st century Britain. Bereavement, grief, trauma and loss catch our communities unawares, de-stablising anything normal and shaking our relationships, beliefs and vision. Even the most expected of deaths causes a complexity and force of emotion that is impossible to articulate and fathom. For months and years following, and at strange times and places, the grief catches us again. Perhaps we hear a song or see a photograph, hear a particular joke or saying. The complexity and pain return and at times overwhelm us – both emotionally and physically. Even when death does not occur, our communities can be shaken by the loss of key events, occasions, marker points of celebration and transition – the de-stablising re-shaping of the normal.

Jesus calls people to life – life in all its fulness – flourishing together. This call is not a simplistic response that says that we should never grieve or feel the pain of loss again. 'Life in all its fullness' (John 10.10) is not shorthand for 'just the good bits when the world seems to be going our way.' But rather, it is a life where we bring our loss and pain and walk together with those who grieve and mourn. And when Jesus teaches, "Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead" (Matt 8.22), we see that we are called to travel on together, to live out our vocation, love and be loved, connect and create – all the while carrying together (and for each other) our suffering and grief. The Christian narrative shows however our community is made up, shaken up and re-formed in our grief and loss – that "nothing can separate us from the love of God." (Romans 8.39)

Grief is intensely private, yet inherently corporate. We experience it together, not just alone. The person lost is missing from us, not just from me. A multi-layered school community grieves in myriad different ways – some demonstrative and visible, others hidden and subtle. Community connection and living well together enables each of us - adults and children - to flourish together – allowing us grace to stagger and stumble, giving us time to dwell in the questions, permitting space for doubt or confusion and embracing together wide-ranging responses in style, tone and content.

Read: Acts 2.42-47; 1 Corinthians 12. 12-26; Colossians 3.11-17



DISCUSS:

Questions *to consider together as a team*

- What difference, if any, does a church school's Christian ethos make to leaders' approach to grief and bereavement? Who might be our necessary companions on this journey?
- What might be the implications for our curriculum design and pastoral care programmes?
- What does living well together actually look like for us when we experience loss? What do we actually do? What do people actually experience as a result of our vision?
- How can we help our community be patient with one another in our grief and bereavement journeys?
- If the flourishing of the teachers goes along with the flourishing of the children – how are we flourishing together and what practical experiences/activities/events could help build this sense of togetherness?



PRAY:

God of all love,

We don't always have the energy to keep giving out to others,

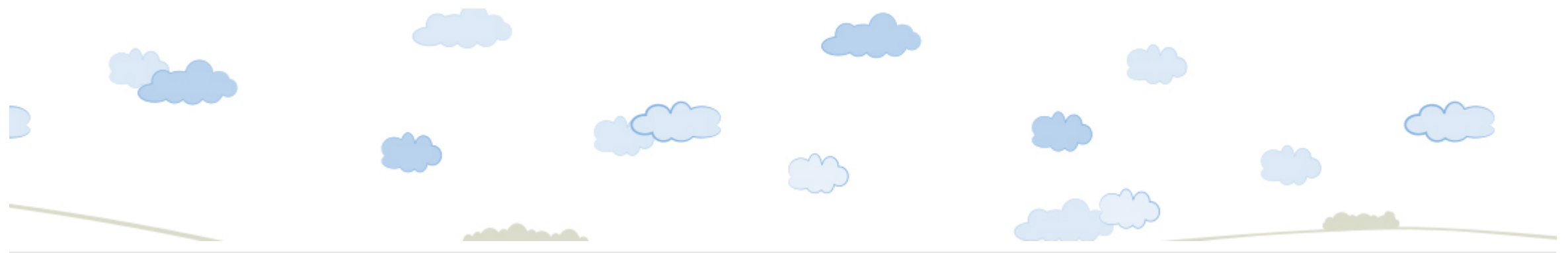
Or the patience to forgive when things go wrong,

But we choose to trust in you together.

Please grant us grace.

Through Jesus Christ our teacher and our Lord.

Amen.



Source URL: <https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/faith-home/i-am-school-leader/educating-community-living-well-together>