

"For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die... a time to weep, and a time to laugh... a time to mourn and a time to dance..."

(Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2, 4)

Death is an unavoidable part of life. Whatever else happens, one day we will die. But it's not something we want to think about or dwell on.

However, in these days of coronavirus, with news and media outlets regularly focussing on the number of deaths, we cannot avoid it. Many of us have a family member, friend, neighbour or work colleague who has been affected.

Our children are very aware of what is happening. Many are anxious, worried about family and friends, asking questions that are not easy to answer. They need us to be honest and appropriate in our responses, which means we need to face our own beliefs and questions, and sometimes admit that we don't know the answers. So, what might the Christian narrative teach us about death and hope?

Death is an end – but is not the end

We all die – our human body comes to an end. But our Christian hope is that this is not **the** end. There is life beyond our earthly experience.

Throughout the Bible we are assured of this. In his encounter with Mary following the death of Lazarus, Jesus reassures her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live...’ (John 11:17-27). And later, in John’s account of the last supper, Jesus tells his disciples, ‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?’ (John 14:1-7).

Christians believe that physical death opens the way to a new life in God’s presence. We can have confidence in a bigger story, because Jesus has gone through it before us.

Christ’s death and resurrection

All four of the Gospel accounts are clear that Jesus actually died. This was physical death after which his body was sealed in a stone tomb. And all four Gospels recount his resurrection, witnessed first by Mary Magdalene, then by his disciples. Through Christ’s resurrection, the power of death was defeated, and through faith we are assured that we too will share in Christ’s resurrection life (Romans 15:12-22). We will be with him in his Father’s house.

Suffering is a part of life

In Genesis 1, we have a picture of a world created good, without suffering or pain, but we live now in a world where suffering is part of life.

Christians are not exempt – like everyone else, we are subject to tragedy, disease and death. Paul talks of our bodies as being like clay jars or earthly tents (In 2 Corinthians 4 and 5), fragile and not permanent. When afflicted by suffering, how should we respond? We might focus on the suffering, allowing ourselves to be overcome by its pain and despair.

But our Christian faith calls us to raise our sights, looking to Jesus (Hebrews 12:2,3), to the eternal hope that is before us, and not lose heart (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). Nothing can separate us from God’s love (Romans 8:31-39), not even the pain of bereavement. God is with us, loving us, walking alongside us in the midst of our suffering (Psalm 22, Psalm 23).

The hope of a new heaven and earth

John’s vision in the book of Revelation points us towards God’s new heaven and earth, where death and mourning, crying and pain will be no more (Revelation 21:1-4). The confusion, sorrow and even anger which we feel in response to death will not be part of our new life in God’s

presence.

In the midst of grief it can feel like we're back at the cross, yet our Christian faith gives us hope and assurance that this is not the end. Through Jesus, God promises us life beyond our earthly experience.

For further resources on Grief and Bereavement, please see ['Never the Same'](#) – a suite of resources for school leaders supporting children and families, and also our [suite of resources for parents](#) focused on Grief, Bereavement and Loss.

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