

Faith to Face

Mike's Article for the Swanage & Wareham Advertiser, January 28th, 2010

Coping with Tragic News

There has been too much bad news recently. I am writing this just one week after the appalling devastation in Haiti, and the subsequent news of the extent of the loss of life and the continuing suffering has just got worse day by day. At last some relief is now getting through, but the problems seem overwhelming. From this distance, we can at least give and pray, however inadequate a response that might seem.

Despite the horrors of the loss and suffering, there have been some glimmers of hope. As I write this, people were still being rescued alive after being buried for days, and last Sunday it was heartening seeing news coverage of Haitian survivors gathering for open-air worship.

This inevitably raises the age-old question: "Where is God in all this suffering, and why does he allow it?" To this I have no easy answer, and this is no time for glib platitudes. All I can say is that the beautiful world in which we live is also a fragile world, in which 'natural' disasters are inevitable due to the earth's instability. God does allow this to happen, but has entered this unpredictable world through his Son, Jesus Christ., and has shared in its suffering. We read in the gospels how Jesus wept at the news of the death of his friend Lazarus, and how he cried over Jerusalem as he foresaw the devastation that would come to it. He himself was later to suffer rejection even by his friends, scourging and his agonizing death on the cross.

Yes, God allows suffering, but he shares in it with us, and will one day bring it to an end. Through faith in his Son Jesus, we can look forward to that day when 'He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces' (Isaiah 25:8) and 'There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed way' (Revelation 21:4)

Swanage Christian Centre

We've been experimenting with **English Afternoon Tea** once a month for overseas visitors and new residents. We should like to put this on a regular footing but need a team of volunteers to help with advertising, baking and welcoming. If you can help, either regularly or occasionally, please join us for some planning on Wednesday, 27th January at 2.30pm ~ or if you can't make that time, give us a ring on 424544.

Remember we are open mornings only until Half Term.

For more info re: the Swanage Christian Centre (the Old Stable) please see attachment (or insert with hard copy).



The King's Church Swanage

Bulletin
January 24th-30th, 2010

*"I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word
and believes him who sent me has eternal life
and will not be condemned;
he has crossed over from death to life."*

John 5:24

Sunday, January 24th

11am: G.L.E.E, visit to Cliff Top

4pm: Informal gathering at the Salvation Army

Pulpit Exchange:

A warm welcome to Father Tony Delsink
from St. Edward's

Please let Ann have any entries for the bulletin by Thursday morning prior to the relevant Sunday
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For your diary:

- **Monday, January 25th, 7.30pm:** Monday Night Praise and Worship at the Salvation Army.
- **Sunday, January 31st, 4pm:** Informal gathering at the Salvation Army. Paul Szkiler with us.
- **Sunday, February 7th, 4pm:** Breaking Bread. Bill Rice with us.
- **Sunday, February 14th, 10.30am:** United Service at the United Reformed Church. There will be no afternoon meeting at the Salvation Army.
- **Monday, February 22nd:** Ecumenical Lent House Groups start and will be studying the York Course '*When I surveyChrist's cross and ours.*'

Sunday, 17th January

Hearts were lifted in praise and worship despite the sadness felt by all at the deaths during the week of two people connected to King's.

Firstly came the news of the sudden and unexpected loss of David Petto on Monday. David, Elena's husband, was known to us all and loved by us all, so shock and grief were profound. Our hearts go out to Elena, to David's sister and brother-in-law and all the family. There will be a tribute to David in the next bulletin. The service of thanksgiving for David's life is on Friday, 5th February, at All Saints' (time to be confirmed).

Then came news on Wednesday of the death of Barbara's nephew, Jonathan, well-known in the community as a gifted blues musician and known to one or two at King's as a kind and patient guitar teacher. We surround Barbara, her sister, Kay (Jonathan's mother) and Jacqui (Jonathan's sister) with our love and prayers. The funeral is on Thursday, 28th January, 11.45am at St. Mary's. Casual wear; no black.

Death touched us at close quarters and also on a far wider scale when news broke of the horrendous earthquake in Haiti ~ the worst humanitarian disaster the UN has had to deal with. All our media sources were full of the heartbreaking scenes of devastation, suffering and the collapse of an entire nation. **We shall be taking up a special offering this Sunday to support Christian Aid relief work in Haiti. Please give generously.**

Death, in a strange way, can be a 'wake-up' call to those still living. It is a salutary reminder of our mortality. It can make us re-assess our lives and our priorities and asks the question: What are you doing with your life? When we are young, fit, healthy and strong, death seems far off. But Psalm 103: 15-16 tells us: *As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.* This is not meant to sound morbid and lugubrious, because for the Christian there is the sure hope of everlasting love, see verse 17. However, we do not know the day or the hour when our mortal life comes to an end and need to make sure we are right with our Creator through Jesus Christ.

Mike, in his talk, focused on a Christian view of death and the after-life. We have had recent reminders that death can come suddenly and unexpectedly, whatever our age (deaths of David, Jonathan and Haitian casualties). None of us is exempt. Ps.31:15 ~ *My times are in your hands* and Psalm 90:12 ~ *Teach me to number my days.*

The O.T. has an incomplete revelation of what lies beyond death. Hebrew 'sheol' (the grave) ~ shady abode of departed spirits. But there are occasional glimpses of life beyond the grave e.g. in Job and the Psalms.

Job ~ oldest book in O.T., but has some precious insights. Job lost his wealth, his children and his health and recognises that *man's days are numbered* (Job 14:5) and asks the age-old question, "*If a man dies, shall he live again?*" (14:14) ~ still being asked today. Later, Job has a revelation that after death, he will see his Redeemer face to face (Job 19: 25-27) and David, a thousand or more years later can similarly say, "*When I awake (from death) I shall see your face.*" (Ps. 17:15) He also gave us that lovely picture in Ps. 23:4 of being able to *walk through the valley of the shadow of death*, without fear of evil, knowing that the Good Shepherd is leading us and protecting us. As we walk through that dark valley, looking unto Jesus (Heb. 12:2), we are drawn towards him, leaving the shadow behind us.

Later still, Isaiah has these beautiful and comforting words: *He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces* (25:8; and 65:19) ~ a theme echoed in Revelation 21:4. Hosea looks forward to the day when the power of death and the grave is broken (13:4) ~ quoted and expanded on by Paul in 1Cor.15: 26 and 54.

Only with the coming of Christ hundreds of years later do we get a fuller picture of what lies ahead after death e.g. John 5: 24-29. For those who believe in Christ, we pass *from death to life*. (Also John 11: 25-26). How does the N.T. describe the state of those who have died as believers? *Asleep, fallen asleep, asleep in Jesus*, (1 Thess. 4: 13-14 and 1 Cor. 15: 6 and 18), *at home with the Lord* (2 Cor. 5:8), *with Christ which is far better* (Phil. 1:23), and *in paradise* (Luke 23:43).

When Christ comes again, we will have new resurrection bodies and *be together with the Lord forever* (1Cor.15: 51-52 and 1Thess.4: 15-18), *transformed into his likeness* (Phil. 3:20-21).

Conclusion:

All who believe in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord have the promise and assurance of eternal life (Jn. 3:16 etc). But we need to be living holy and godly lives, ready to meet him face to face (1 Jn.3:2-3), for none of us knows when that time will come. But come it surely will: let's make sure we are ready to meet our Lord!