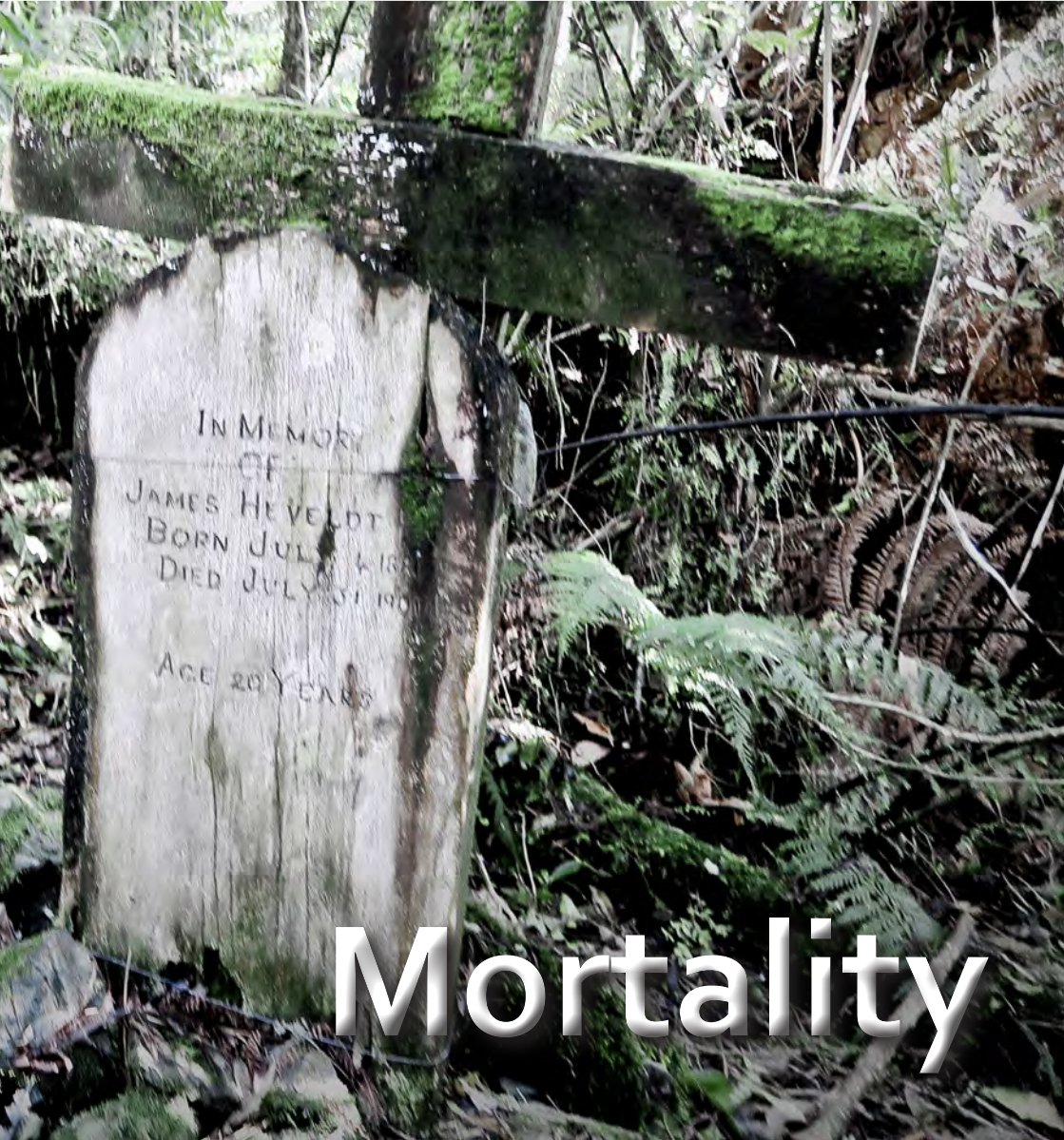


Refresh

Journal of Contemplative Spirituality
Volume 18 Number 2 Summer 2018.



IN MEMORY
OF
JAMES HEVELOT
BORN JULY 4 1888
DIED JULY 31 1908
AGE 20 YEARS

Mortality



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Photo Credit: Brittany Wright

Remembering SGM Convenor Mike Wright

Mike's unexpected death from a massive infection in late July 2017, left his family and friends reeling. SGM Workgroup members were shocked and deeply saddened and so, although many of you have never met Mike, we want to take this opportunity to honour his memory by sharing a little of what he meant to us and his part in SGM over the years.

Mike began his spiritual direction formation early in the new millennium, driving with Geoff Skilton, from Dunedin to Christchurch to attend workshops. He embraced the riches of contemplative spirituality which were such a good fit for Mike's faith journey and his emerging ministry as a tertiary chaplain at Otago University and Polytechnic, a position held with great integrity and exercised with wisdom and compassion until his untimely death.

Over the years we enjoyed Mike's company, his humour, his strength of body and mind, his intellect and smile, his love and deep connection with God. He was a workshop leader, Waikanae team member, supervisor, Workgroup member and, following Andrew Pritchard's recent retirement, Convenor of SGM.

Mike wove his place into our hearts and, at our September workgroup meeting, sadly conscious of his empty chair, we spent the first hour gently grieving, remembering, giving thanks and honouring this lovely man who gave fully to others and was a fine example of the glory of God, a light in the darkness for many.

We continue to uphold Mike's family – his wife Sheryl, their children, Emma, Brittany, and Taylor, and all who were close to Mike – in our love and prayers.

Jane Wilkinson on behalf of SGM Workgroup



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Jesus' Kenosis and Mortality

'The kenosis of the Son of Man is neither his singular privilege, nor did it occur because he was humble: it occurred because he was human...

'...We are all kenotic, emptied of the divinity that is lodged hidden in each one of us; we are all naked, so to speak, without our most authentic clothing. Even though we all have a divine origin and are temples of divinity, we appear, all of us, not only to others but even to ourselves, as mere individual members of a species subject to suffering and death. Jesus did not hide this situation from us.

'...Even though I find it difficult to express, I can surely observe that not only Jesus' life but mine too bears an infinite value precisely because it is limited in form and manifestation. My life is unique and thus beyond comparison; it cannot be compared to or placed on the same plane as anything else. It is precisely in my being finite, being concrete, being contingent that I touch the infinite, the divine.'

Adapted from Raimon Panikkar, *Christophany, The Fullness of Man*

2 Corinthians 4:7-12

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned;
struck down, but not destroyed.

We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus,
so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.
For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake,
so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body.
So then, death is at work in us, but life is at work in you.

The Sea and the Shore

by Mike Riddell

One summer I went fishing with a friend. We were in a small dinghy with a Seagull outboard motor. My friend navigated us to a favourite spot a great distance from the shore. We had mediocre success with our fishing, but it was a wonderful place to sit bobbing in the boat in the evening sun, alternating between conversation and silence.

As the shadows grew longer, it was clearly time to head in. My friend started the motor, and we began to putter our way homeward. After a few moments, the outboard coughed and died. A little investigation revealed the cause – we were out of petrol. I looked toward the far-distant shore – then at the oars that lay on the floor.

We began to row, taking it in turns. Suddenly the distance seemed impossible. We were some miles away from our destination. Each stroke of the oars seemed so hopeless in terms of moving us closer. Every time I checked, it seemed we were no nearer. It began to grow dark, and I started to become worried.

There was nothing else to do, but to row onward. We knew our families were waiting for us, but we had no way to contact them. I thought my arms would fall out of their sockets – such was the weariness of pulling on those oars. Eventually I found my way into a rhythm, and nothing but the oars dipping into the gently bobbing sea.

I venture that the certainty
of death is what deepens the
appreciation of life.

I was able to forget about my panic and ignore the pain. Even the distance to be travelled receded from consciousness. All I knew was the rowing, and each stroke that constituted it. My focus shifted to the strangely satisfying cadence of the activity. And of course eventually, our small but regular rowing brought us home.

Some thirty years later, I developed a little mantra to use in my morning prayer: *with every breath, I row toward the distant shore*. It serves to focus me on my breathing, and also to set my meditation within the context of mortality. Through repetition of these simple words, the present moment and the voyage are somehow intertwined. And I'm conscious each repeated breath has a horizon.

I venture that the certainty of death is what deepens the appreciation of life. If our margins were the infinite and meaningless expanse suggested by existentialism – then breathing is a pointless and autonomous waste of time. For it simply prolongs the state of being becalmed in a vacant wasteland.

But if the number of our breaths is finite, each one becomes a vibrant participation in the journey we all must take.

* * *



© Anne McDonald

This might have been a philosophical discussion had I not been recently diagnosed with an aggressive form of prostate cancer.

I don't imagine there's ever an easy time to learn of cancer, but it certainly took me by surprise. I've always considered myself in robust good health. In the sixty-four years since my birth, I've never darkened the door of a hospital as a patient.

All that changed very rapidly.

My frequent meditations on death took on a personal significance. Mortality was no longer an abstract concept but an immediate threat. Dreams of a golden autumn with my beloved wife seemed in danger of slipping away. It wasn't so much dying I was afraid of, but being cheated of the years I'd hoped for.

Yet over a period of weeks, I started to be overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude for each day I enjoyed!

Not that my demise is in any way certain, nor even expected in the near future. I'm lucky to be in the hands of a great team of medical professionals, who'll do whatever they can to restore my health. In the midst of the indignities of treatment, I've retained a robust sense of black humour, and a commitment to live as well as I can. Once again I've adopted the refrain of Julian of Norwich: 'All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well'.

It seems to me whatever is alive is temporal – however short or long that period of existence may be. The gift of life is accompanied by the presence of death. Neither can be separated from the other.

In my earlier years as a minister of religion, I was an attendant to birth and death. Both were times of awe. In their presence, I had the abiding sense I was trespassing on sacred times of transition.

I vividly recall being summoned to the maternity ward at Green Lane Hospital in the early hours of the morning. There I found two very dear friends of ours, distraught. The wife had been pregnant with twins. She'd unknowingly eaten mussels contaminated with listeria – her babies consequently born at a non-viable stage.

They were so very tiny.

I held one of the twins, a boy, in the palm of my hand as he died. I later compared the experience to being at a railway station with that strange sense of arrival and departure. These fledgling lives had only just made their appearance in the world, and now were already leaving. It was of course tragic, but also a privileged witnessing – of the chain of life and death.

Permanence is, I think, overrated. That which is unchanging loses all fascination to me. It is to be without beginning or end; without adaptation or growth.

We – in our humanity – occupy the realm of the ephemeral.

Perhaps as a consequence we yearn for a realm of the eternal – where there shall be no more change or death with its sharp pain of loss. And yet such longing is a betrayal of our essential destiny and condition.

* * *

'Change and decay in all around I see, O thou who changest not, abide with me', implores one of our favourite funeral hymns. But I venture to suggest this sentiment is deeply misguided and theologically suspect. On the one hand, we believe we've been made in the image of God. On the other, we imagine the One who created us is entirely different by virtue of being outside the realm of change.

As theologians like Jürgen Moltmann elucidate: the blend of humanity and divinity in the notion of incarnation breaks apart such concepts of an immutable God. That concept is sub-Christian. If God enters into human life, then death enters into the experience of the divine. And furthermore, if God is so intimately connected to life, as the majority of human religions propose, it would seem the evolution and history of the world demand that God's experience is changing.

This may seem a contentious and overly abstract argument. But it's full of portent for the way we choose to live – and whether we view mortality as a curse or a blessing. Should we do all we can to hang on to this roller coaster of life, waiting patiently until we can escape it? Or should we embrace its opposite, understanding it's in the realm of flux and loss that we discover the full essence of our being?

**If God enters into human life,
then death enters into the
experience of the divine.**

Certainly, our culture sides with maintaining the myth of transcending death and decay. Beauty products and health supplements beguile us with their promise of escape from the inevitable effects of ageing. Many medical professionals regard the death of their patients as a personal failure. The mechanics of demise are hidden behind screens in funeral parlours and morgues. Our inspirational images highlight youth and vigour rather than age and decline.

And yet we live in a cosmos where change is the constant. Mortality is our environment, with the great pulsing forces of life and death surrounding us. To run from life or hide from our essential participation in such flux belittles us. It's our very fragility that creates our beauty. Is there a season of the year that doesn't have its own resplendent magnificence? Each one reminding us the great dance of life and death – is one we can't sit out.

The measure of a life is not its length but its depth. Each moment is fleeting – it can neither be held nor regained. And yet every moment contains the entire meaning of being alive – if only it's embraced. To be human is to be mortal, and to be mortal

is to have vitality in our veins and change on our horizon. Facing into the stream of inescapable novelty, we learn moment by moment the glorious essence of our being.

* * *

As Leonard Cohen wrote so memorably: 'And when he knew for certain only drowning men could see him, he said all men will be sailors then until the sea shall free them'.

With every breath, I row toward the distant shore. What is this shore that we are heading toward? Death, certainly. The cessation of bodily function, and the beginning of decomposition as we return to the elements from which we are formed. But perhaps also the harbour, the place of safety and embrace.

The magic of this gift of mortality is that the shore is equidistant from every moment of existence. Transience and depth are intertwined with sadness and aching beauty – precisely what calls to us in every great work of art, and in each moment of fleeting encounter with this glorious ecosystem in which we find our home.

In the mystery of one breath, we can reach the shore and know ourselves safe and loved.

When we fear a lack of direction or momentum, or when our small craft is about to be overturned by forces beyond our control – one single breath is able to move us toward our destination.

Paul Tillich spoke of the presence of the divine as 'The Ground of Being'. In contemplative terms, I take this to mean that drilling down into each moment, or riding each breath to its source, is a means of touching the ineffable Presence within and without.

Rather than fear or resist mortality, my response is to welcome it and rejoice. Life is not anything to be grasped, but instead to be celebrated. We ride its tides – both incoming and on the ebb. We remain sailors on an ocean that's always more than us, yet somehow the very element in which we have our being.

As David Bowie had it:

I watch the ripples change their size
But never leave the stream
Of warm impermanence
And so the days float through my eyes.

Surrender to Life

by Andrew Norton

Have you come
to the end
of yourself
where
even
the white flag
lies
still
on the ground beside you?

This
ending you
feared,
dreaded,
struggled against
and
ultimately
defeated you
is nothing more than a
lie.

The
truth
of all life
is:
the
seed must
die.
The poor in spirit
know what
happiness
is.
Those who fall
to the ground;
the humble
stand
strong.
But this
is
all
too much for your
stubborn
will
to concede.
Surrender
to life.

A Glimpse of Mortality

by Sally Carter

Just before Christmas 2016, I was diagnosed with breast cancer. Now my treatment is over and the signs are good – but it's been a time when the fact of mortality came into sharp focus.

The first thing I noticed was how violent the language around cancer is. 'Invasive ductal carcinoma' sounded a lot worse than a 12mm lump that looks like a clove.

We use military imagery – speaking of people 'losing their battle with cancer' or 'fighting a courageous battle'.

This wasn't helpful to me. I didn't feel particularly brave or courageous. I had cancer. I wasn't *fighting* reality, but learning how to live with it.

The first thing I noticed was how violent the language around cancer is.

Some days were depressing, some ordinary and some delightful. There are moments of deep sadness, moments of relief – just life really.

A friend and I imagined a better way to talk about cancer. 'Journey' seemed too pleasurable and leisurely to describe the experience. So we thought perhaps a car rally! Navigating corners the best we can, some of them blind, some slippery, some predictable and steady.

I found a story by Antony di Mello helpful:

I Chop Wood

When the Zen Master attained Enlightenment he wrote the following lines to celebrate it: 'Oh wondrous marvel: I chop wood! I draw water from the well!'

After enlightenment nothing really changes. The tree is still a tree; people are just what they were before; and so are you. You may continue to be as moody or even-tempered, as wise or foolish. The one difference is that you see things with a different eye. You are more detached from it all now. And your heart is full of wonder.

I suspect I've a long way to go 'til I attain enlightenment – but a cancer diagnosis does tend to focus the mind. I'm certainly just as moody or even-tempered, just as wise or foolish as I was before the diagnosis. But I do notice a greater awareness in the ordinariness of life and death: hearing with joy the downward liquid notes of a fernbird; walking, however slowly, in the calm, still beauty of an estuary in the evening light; allowing the blowing of a gale, the roar of the surf, the flash of lightning to fill me with awe; watching spring bulbs come into bloom; immersing myself in the beauty of music. And of course spending time with friends and family – whatever is life-giving and true.



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In his much admired book, *Being Mortal*,ⁱ Atul Gawande reminds us, 'Medicine is the easy stuff...it's all this 'other stuff' which is hard. How are we going to live well? What is important now, knowing that sooner or later, we are going to die?'

These questions have formed an important part of my glimpse of mortality.

I've become acutely aware that dying is a part of life – a constant in the path of human existence. One which looms larger at some times than others.

Having caught a glimpse of death on a nearer horizon, I'm listening to the words of Henri Nouwen, one of my wise spiritual guides: 'The beauty and preciousness of life is intimately linked with its fragility and mortality. We can experience that every day - when we take a flower in our hands, when we see a butterfly dance in the air, when we caress a little baby. Fragility and giftedness are both there, and our joy is connected with both.'

Ageing Gently

by Margaret Gwynn

I cannot know the time or the nature of my dying, as yet, and that fits well with the not-knowing of my spiritual journey. But what do I notice as I grow older?

Well, I cherish the infinite sacredness of many things – rhythms of the sea, shapes of clouds, the golden sunlight in spring bulbs, bird song, the special nature of each season, the silken feel of flower petals, the warmth in a friend's smile...

My emotions are less guarded. I cry at the beauty of a cadence in music, grieve over the callous indifference too often shown towards beneficiaries, get angry when we know the solutions we must take to remedy poverty, climate change or polluted waters, but lack the will to act.

I laugh more easily too and forgive myself much more generously.

I don't take my physical abilities for granted anymore. Each day I'm grateful when my back bends, my knees kneel and I don't fall. I know my health may change at any time, and sometimes I struggle with fear about losing my husband, Robin, or dying in pain or confusion.

Laboriously over the years I've crafted my understanding of the One at the heart of the universe. Walking labyrinths has helped greatly in this. Lately I have been using a breath meditation suggested by Deepak Chopra in *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind*. As I inhale, I imagine I'm drawing the air from a point infinitely far away at the edge of the universe. As I exhale – I send the air back to its source.

I see myself as a tiny fragment of God's I Am – loved and held and valued.

I trust that will see me through death to the Beyond.

River of life

by Ana Lisa de Jong

Whether I live or die,
it's all for you.
I live and die in vain
when I seek anything,
beyond what you've ordained.
The secret is to be content.
To travel as far within as without.
To swim in the current that
brought me here.
And then without doubt
I will follow it out.

ⁱ Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal*, Profile Books Ltd, United Kingdom (2015), also on a *Frontline Documentary* available online at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/being-mortal> See book review page 42.

A Story of Mercy and Healing

It's never easy to come to terms with the death of a child. Even more so when a mother set out on a path that results in this death.

I ask myself how would I, as a mother, ever come to terms with a T.O.P. (as it's called these days)? Four decades ago it was called abortion. This is perhaps where I underestimated the incredible grace, mercy and unconditional love and forgiveness God was willing to give – if I would travel the path of healing with Him and with those He would put around me.

On a car journey with two friends, earlier this year, we were sharing about life's ups and downs. One of them revealed an abortion she'd had many years ago and how healing had been possible for her.

My heart and brain were racing. How could she speak to us so openly about this hidden and shameful event...what had happened in her life to bring about her healing?

I reached out and held her hand. She responded, 'It's okay now'.

From within me (and this is God's grace) I managed to stumble out the long-hidden words: 'It's me, it's me...I had an abortion'. Immediately, I was enveloped in non-judgmental, unconditional love from both these dear people. A door – long closed on a deep and dark secret – was opened. And the light and love of Christ filtered in.

...at last like Lazarus, I emerged from that darkness which seemed to entomb me.

My healing journey began.

Within weeks, I was booked in to a Rachel's Vineyard Retreat: 'healing the pain of abortion one weekend at a time'. It was a life changer, starting with being unconditionally loved and completely accepted. The retreat leaders sat either side of us in the meeting room and slept in rooms alongside us at night. To keep us held at all times – there's always a high ratio of leaders to retreatants.

During each session we were soaked in the scriptures. These words of Jesus found a home in my heart, 'Who is there to condemn you?' 'What do you want of me?' I drank from the cup of bitterness and Living Water, and at last like Lazarus, I emerged from that darkness which seemed to entomb me.

Along the way, when the time was right, I laid down my past and let it go. We spoke of forgiveness for myself and those who were a part of my story. We wrote in our journals. Confession and absolution were given and received.

We were encouraged to name our babies. Each child was named, honoured and blessed during a service of Communion.



The turning point came for me late on that Saturday night when I went to the chapel, took down the icon of the Trinity, placed it on a chair close to the altar, and nestled my 'baby' against it. Safe and secure in the arms of a loving and gracious Father, close to the heart of a deeply compassionate Christ, and bathed in the light and freedom of the Holy Spirit.

My past had been forgiven, my child named, loved and acknowledged; then returned to a forever forgiving God where he'd always been kept safe. I could move on with freedom and a greater capacity for inner space – where the Trinity could come and 'be' with me in new and loving ways.

A wholeness I'd never known possible entered my life.

My healing journey continues. I've become aware of the deep and painful long-term psychological and spiritual implications a termination has on any woman. It's a traumatic event with many consequences. I'm concerned the insufficient information often given and the web of pressure around someone who finds themselves unexpectedly pregnant in the 'wrong' situation – often results in a hasty decision.

The consequences are grave in every sense of the word. Looking back over my life I can see now the secret I carried caused untold pain for me and others close to me. So many times, I couldn't understand why I reacted in certain ways – now it's all begun to make sense.

The story of love and forgiveness in Luke 7 resonates deeply with me. I was a vulnerable young woman, caught up in circumstances that soon were beyond my control. I share these thoughts to bring hope to others in the same position.

Name withheld at the request of the writer

The place of her retreat can be found at <https://rachelsvineyard.org.nz>

Psalms 111:4 How gracious and merciful is our Lord

Psalms 116:4 How kind the Lord is...so merciful this God of ours

Romans 8:1 Now there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

Romans 8:38 And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love.

Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow – not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below – indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Mortality vs Death

by Leslie Ayers

Over years of walking together every week, my friend Pam and I covered many kilometres. We also traversed many a topic in our easy side-by-side companionship.

One year, as Easter approached, we reminisced about our childhoods – where and how our faith developed. Sounding somewhat embarrassed, Pam confessed, 'You know, I've always had a strong awareness of mortality, even as a child'.

Relieved to find a kindred spirit, I admitted, 'So have I!'

Was this normal in children, we wondered? Do all people have that early awareness?

It was hardly a topic for morning talks or playground conversations... 'Hey, had some really cool thoughts about mortality last night – you too?!'

We felt our childhood experience had been ordinary enough – enjoying friends and games and the countryside. But with our strong sense of *memento mori*, perhaps we'd been contenders for a junior branch of the Benedictines? We both agreed that far from being a morbid thing, our awareness led to greater enjoyment and appreciation of life. Helped put things into perspective, gave us gratitude for each day, for others, for our time in this fascinating world.

The fact of our mortality had given us a context in which to live life and make decisions. I think St Benedict would have approved. But I've found in my later years, awareness of mortality is somehow different from facing up to one's own death, or the deaths of those we love.

The earlier is more philosophical, but the latter touches something in me that cries – 'Not yet! There's still much to do. What about the people I love? I'm not ready to let them go. I'm not ready to go. Not yet!'

Pam faced her terminal illness with courage, and did all she could to hang on to life. Treatment after ghastly treatment, she fought death – right to the end. There was no way she wanted to be taken from this earth, from the people she loved.

Like her I find, paradoxically, I can possess a peace about mortality/eternity at the deepest part of me. And yet death – the bringer of that mortality – is something else. I'm all right about my human body being finite; I just don't want to die!

Fortunately, I have the example of the one I follow – Jesus.

In his life, I find a place for these disparate points of view. There is in him, a conviction of eternity, an assurance of a life beyond these mortal limits, a deep trust.

But, Jesus also shows me there's nothing wrong with weeping, nothing wrong with railing against the pain and loss of death. I find that really comforting.

**I'm all right about my human
body being finite; I just
don't want to die!**

Speech to Death

by Ed Duggan



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Death – when I was a child you used to terrify me so much I couldn't even think about you. I'd run away from you and do everything I could to avoid you – even when you struck close to me.

When the lab assistant at school became ill with cancer, I didn't visit him or attend his funeral, fearing you'd see me and come for me.

As I became a teenager, I conceptualised you as something that happened to others – not me. You wouldn't happen to me as science would eventually beat you into submission before I became old! Old, at fourteen, seemed a long way off.

Death – in typical teenage fashion I became morbidly fascinated at the times you arrived on a grand scale. I read and watched films about your massive events such as epidemics, nuclear war, asteroid impacts and super volcanoes. Always thinking I'd be safe in New Zealand, as we're far away from the rest of the world.

Imagine my consternation when I discovered how Lake Taupo was formed!!!!

In my twenties and thirties, I didn't think of you much – Death – assuming I was just too young to die. I was far too busy establishing a career and a family to give you much notice.

As I approached forty, I kept saying to myself, I have more years to come than I have lived. After forty, I'd discount my childhood to stay on the right side of the equation. So when my mate, Ned, suddenly died of a heart attack at forty-five, I took my age of forty-three, deducted eighteen to get twenty-five. Yep – Death – on the basis of probability, even at forty-three, I still had more to come.

Anyway, Ned smoked and ate a roast every second day, so I was safe from a heart attack taking me early.

But Death – a few things happened that started me thinking more about you in the decade following Ned's untimely demise. I began to notice people meeting you who were my age or younger, usually at the hands of your henchperson, cancer. Another school friend was delivered to you by liver cancer. Another completed a suicide to meet you. And I turned fifty.

It simply became less possible for me to kid myself that I had more life to come than I'd lived. I had now entered the countdown. At the same time, I realised science just wasn't going to beat you in my life time.

**Death – I suspect thinking
about you is a form of
contemplation.**



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Death – I finally understood that you and I would meet one day – and you would take me from this world.

I'm not sure whether thinking about my mortality and our eventual meeting started my move to a more contemplative spirituality. But – Death – I suspect thinking about you is a form of contemplation.

I started to sit with God. I meditated more on the Word.

And as I sat quietly with God, I began to see God's love for us. I started to understand the wonder of the salvation that's been provided for us. I became transfixed by what God had done to reach out and love us all. God's good news became more real than the chair I was sitting in. I exist for no other reason than God loves me and that is sufficient.

At that point – Death – my fear of you subsided. Yes, one day we'll meet and on that day God will be there to take me to live in heaven. I'll meet you for a passing moment. And then with all the saints – I'll live in the loving community of the Trinity.

Death – you are but a step in my journey and I no longer fear you. When you come for me, I'll be ready to greet and embrace you. And once I have embraced you, I will walk hand in hand with my God into the eternal city of light.

Psalm 86:11 Tell me where you want me to go and I will go there. May every fibre of my being unite in reverence to your name.

How long have I got left, God?
You smile and we both know
I'm not really expecting an answer

I'm so excited about this birthday
been looking forward to it for ages

Somehow it feels hugely significant
like the major intersections
we came to yesterday

The new GPS, bought by my man
so I won't get lost
told us about them
well in advance

Prepare to turn left in 1200 metres
Prepare to turn left in 800 metres
Prepare to turn left in 300 metres
Take the next left

Easy, so long as the final destination
is keyed in correctly
In this case all that was needed
was to press history to find
a list of familiar places
home being the most
frequently used

So, how about the road HOME
is it so easy to find?

We read that we'll hear
a word in our ear
when we turn to the
left or the right but it
doesn't seem so simple
unless it's just my hearing loss

You remind me that it's taken you
a long time to free me from
Pinocchio thinking

That you never intended me
to dangle from strings
unable to make
my own decisions

That you trust me never to
lose sight of my final destination
even if I can't actually see it

That I can treat the road
I take every day as a new one
where surprises and delights
can still be found

I love the freedom you give
or at least, I think I do

Sometimes it would be nice
to slip back into soldier mentality
waiting for orders from the top

You suggest I stop trying to rush
to the goalpost of the future
and instead, enjoy today
because this is the
only shot at it I'll get

Good thinking, loving God
good thinking

I Always Thought

by Anna Johnstone

I always thought dying was quite simple
A last breath then waking up in heaven
immediately to your smile, Jesus
and starting a glorious new life

That was until our home group
used a new study book which
challenged my childhood idea

It was a shock to consider that
maybe there were other ways
of looking at death and eternity

Then our Pastor's wife told me
that her family believes that
after death, there's nothing
until you come back, Jesus
then everything happens
That's far more fair

If we all get to start the party together
rather than all the lucky ones
getting to the table first
eating all the sausage rolls
and cream cakes, as it were
exploring heaven and drinking the fine wine
while we late-comers trail in at the end

If we die and just wait for you, Jesus
I think it'll be like after an operation
when the time from when you count
back with the anaesthetist 10, 9, 8, 7...
to when you wake up seems like
a few seconds but can be
hours and hours

So, if this is what happens
I don't have to worry
I know I'll be kept safe in your love
angels around just as the nurses are
in the recovery room
ready for that amazing moment
when it's time to wake from
the last long sleep into
the first beautiful
new day

*from her forthcoming book
The Last Walk – out December 2017*



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<http://www.jphotographic.co.nz>

What if...?

by Andrew Dunn

It's a bit of a rocket to lose a loved one of many years. Acutely, the question is raised: how or where in our faith do we locate adequate ways to understand – and live with the loss.

One traditional locus within the doctrine of 'the communion of saints', declares that in the mystery of our mortality and dying – death hasn't ended our life long relationship. In this we believe we become part of and experience – the all-embracing communion shared by the saints who've gone before.

Which is a very big ask!!

But what if this huge faith structure proves to be too vast, too impersonal, too out of this world, to be of much comfort or empathetic relational nourishment? Sure, its grandeur is wonderful, but its personal practicality – well – not so much?

What then?

These musing led me to take a fresh look at St Paul's, St John's and Jesus' notions of the relational imagery in the terms *en Christo* (in Christ) and *en autou* (in Him).

In Ephesians 1, Paul articulates this in numerous ways: in the Lord, in Christ Jesus, in the Lord Jesus Christ. In John 15, Jesus speaks of this relational connection with believers, 'Abide in me and I in you', and in John 17, 'I in them ...'

What if these remarkable relational glimpses actually deepen in death?

En Christo is often expounded as a corporate way of being in the Body of Christ, in the Church, baptised into Him. But what if it also has a deeply personal – even individual – content? What if *En Christo* embraces two people who – in their faith and discipleship – have been woven together into something rich and profound which even death itself doesn't, can't, won't diminish or end? Couldn't this 'in Christ-ness' continue to nourish and bless and hold rich realities that the loss of physical connectedness hasn't destroyed? How would that look? How would that function?

And what if the sense of their presence isn't simply some lingering yearning for times past or a psychotic function of grief? What if, on an emotional and spiritual level, the 'in Christ-ness' is a reality that's as real as togetherness was – over the together years?

Indeed, what if the daily invitation to join together in the loving communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit in daily devotion is as real as it was before the rocket struck? What if being really is communion?

And what about exploring the cosmology of John and Paul: 'All things came into being through him...' (John 13) and 'All things have been created through him and for him... and in him all things hold together.' (Colossians 1:16-17).

For me, recent discoveries in astronomy deepen the significance of this perspective.

Managers of the Hubble Telescope report what happened when they pointed it at small 'empty' segment of sky and left their recording devices on. Ten days later they examined the results. Imagine their excitement when they found hazy photos of many galaxies further beyond our own than anything recorded to date!

They did the same thing again – after upgrading and digitalizing the Hubble equipment during the final visit by the space shuttle. This time the result was even more staggering. Hundreds of galaxies were recorded – all in the same small black patch of sky where nothing had ever been seen from earth before.

Physicist, cosmologist, author and Director of Research at the Centre for Theoretical Cosmology within the University of Cambridge, Stephen Hawking, made the bold statement that this discovery now led him to believe there's probably no outside edge to the universe! What if...?

So, in the light of New Testament assertions that Christ holds everything together in being – how might this scientific discovery expand our understanding of John's and Paul's claims for our Lord?

What if everything in creation is as vast and unlimited as the Hubble discoveries suggest? And what if all of it came into being through Him, for Him, in Him! And what about everything existing in Him! What does that do to our faith in God's grace and love? And what does that suggest for being a people in Christ?

It certainly rocks my theology expansively!

Couldn't this expanding view also enlarge our grasp and experience of 'being in Christ' with our loved one(s) who've 'gone on before', for now and all eternity?

How does one contain the joy and excitement of that!?

And finally, as spiritual directors, priests, ministers and pastors: how can we deepen and develop the richness of such a lasting relational reality in those with whom we journey through the dark valley?

What if...?

What if these remarkable relational glimpses actually deepen in death?

If You Could See

by Ana Lisa de Jong

If you could see the circle of our house,
you who have lost.
You might see that just because,
they are for a moment
out of sight;
they have not gone.

No, our house is higher,
and wider
in circumference,
than what we can measure
with our mortal senses,
and human minds.

If we could see the circle of His house,
we who have lost.
We might walk a little easier,
knowing that He is with us.
And those we can no longer see –
just up front.

Our house, is a circle.
We are all just a hands breadth a way.
Our fingers, they cannot reach,
or voices cross the miles.
But we are somehow
still contained,
by the hands, in which we're held.

Two months after my father died I was in Taiwan for a conference. One night I was woken by the sound of laughter. It felt like the most unexpected place to have my father turn up in a dream after his death. It was beautiful.



Allan turns up in Taiwan

by Martin Stewart

I didn't know you even knew where Taiwan was
much less how to get there

you simply turned up one morning
waking me
with a shared joke that left us
both laughing

you floated there, I guess,
turning right at Hong Kong

or, did you pack yourself in my bag
– a naughty stowaway catching a ride
saying – 'you know, I've never been to Taiwan,
that place on all the clothing labels'

I didn't notice you coming along
the bag felt no heavier

you simply snuck along for free
and surprised me
and invited me to recognise
that you insist
on being held lightly
not heavily

to save me excess baggage charges

Questions of Dying

by Jo Anastasiadis

Life, death
Death, life
It comes, it goes
Suddenly or prolonged
Prolonged or suddenly
Painfully or gently
Gently or painfully
We do not get to choose
Yet it is ours guaranteed
We are born; we will die.

Will we go kicking and screaming?
Will we be at peace in those final moments?
Only You know.
Will we cling to what is here?
What will that be that we will not want to lose?
Will we long for the world beyond?
What will it be that we want to leave behind?

What do we fear as we come face to face with our own mortality?
The unknown? The way death may take us: Slowly? Painfully?
Down the road of dementia? Cancer? Stroke and its losses? ...
Or suddenly? No chance to say goodbye!
Tasks left unfinished? Relationships left unhealed?
A life only half lived, or fully, or not at all?
Regrets? Questions left unanswered? Important things left unsaid?
What legacy might we leave behind? What legacy do we want to leave behind?
What might be stripped from us in our dying?
What do we get to take with us?
What fears do we feel as we think of our own death?
What fears, as we think of the death of those we love?

Will I want to die, but be left living, lingering?
How powerless will I be – in voice, movement, thought?
How will I choose to spend those days, weeks, months ... years?
Will I grow angry at You? Frustrated or pained at the suffering?
Will I still even remember You?
Or will the me that then is, be a shadow of who I once was?
Will You be able to find me if I only reside in the recesses of my soul?
I hear once again the words of a mental health consumer echoing:
“Even in my insanity, God still found me.
Even at my most insane, I was not lost to God!”

Will You seek to grow me even in this space?
How might You grow those around me through my own journey of dying?
What life might come from my ... our dying?
How can we live well now, that we might die well then?

Then there are the whys:
Why did You let him/her/them die so young?
Why do You let them linger in so much pain?
Why don't You stop the suffering?
They were accomplishing so much for You – Why?
They leave behind a new-born, why?
Yet I hear no answer, only a question hanging in the space between us:
“Now that this has happened, how will you respond?”

Life so fragile, death so certain
Every moment of living is part of our dying
And every breath of dying is part of our living
None of us know where, when or how
But we all know death will come
I find myself asking:
How shall I live today, so that if I die today, I will have truly lived?

Time in the Dying Room

by Brian Ensor

In the house that is my life I have a room for everything. I have a kitchen for food and drink. I have a lounge for friends and a bit of television. I have a bedroom for sleep and intimacy. I have a sickbay where I keep my pills and potions and see my doctor.

I have a ballroom where there is glamour and beauty. I have a basement to chuck stuff I never want to see again. They aren't all literal of course. But real enough.

As part of this house I have a dying room because I will die. It is where I go to ponder my mortality, where I make my preparations, where eventually I will die.

A dying room has people there, who are part of your dying either in the preparations or in the actual dying. I have thought about who might want to be there. A dying room is furnished with the accoutrements and paraphernalia of dying, things like beds and commodes and medicine pumps. And also furnished with the things that connect me to the eternal and to the transcendent. Prayers and stories and music. Images of the universe and the microscopic.

Certainly, you may recognise some furnishings from the Presbyterian church, but a lot aren't. For instance, there's the smell of freshly cut grass, which can move my soul.

It is not a room I visit often. I know it's there and can end up there at unexpected times. Everyone has something in the way of a dying room, in various states of repair.

At their best, a dying room is welcoming, comfortable, meaningful. At their worst they're scary, incoherent, unexamined – furnished with scraps from Sunday school, weird dreams and bad movies. These deserve a good clean out.

In Hospice, it's part of the work of spiritual carers to sometimes help refurbish these rooms, chuck out a lot of the rubbish and suggest other things to put in their place – things more consistent with the person who's dying and what they want and need.

A problem for us helping professionals is we're so comfortable checking out other people's dying rooms – we can assume all is okay in our own. Or mistake our Work Room for our Dying Room.

Our Work room has so much stuff about Dying in it, that we head there when discussing our own dying. It's fully furnished with theories and reading and theology and other people's experiences. Our Work Room is a place where we have confidence and competence and control. Potentially very different from our own personal Dying Room. We make a mistake when we conflate the two.

I was at a conference in September where there was a well-regarded international speaker – a doctor – originally from South America but now living in Canada. He was very keen on discussing death and dying and bringing it out into the open.

He believed we should die with 'panache'. For his 50th birthday he curated his own funeral. He prepared for this day by reviewing his life, and by building bridges with



those who he'd hurt. He wrote letters and made phone calls. His family bought him his own coffin for his birthday and when the big day arrived they had a funeral. He lay in his coffin – they played his chosen funeral music and people spoke about him and to him. And then his family took him in his coffin for a trip around, brought it back, opened it up and there we go.

It struck me as odd, but there's nowt so queer as folk.

I'm happy with the idea of reviewing a life and mending relationships and pausing to stop and think. But how much can you fake the essence of a Funeral? A funeral without a loss, a city without the people, a birth without a baby. My concern would be that 'the show' as a surrogate for real life can mislead us in our preparation.

The speaker who followed resonated more with me. She worked with grieving people. Grief, she said, is strong enough to disconnect a person from themselves. A person in the pain of grief cannot connect with others, cannot empathise; they are split off from themselves until there is some healing around the wound that itself will not heal. The emotional overwhelms the planning. It's not the person who organises their way through grief; it's the community that holds them until they start to walk again. Although we may be an expert in dying, it has never been our dying.

In my work as a palliative care doctor, I will go into the dying room with a person.

I can discuss, if they want, what is happening. I can outline some of what happens in that room, and what needs to be done and what needs to be there. This can settle something of the fear of the unknown: that death for most people comes slowly enough not to surprise them; that it's heralded by exhaustion – such that death when it comes is not unwelcome; that dying is still hard work for many, and we should prepare for that as well.

People do die well, sometimes by accident, sometimes by preparation.

Theologically, this is where the rubber hits the road. When our understanding of our place in this life is tested by our losing this life. Do belief and reality harmonise? Can we look at death and understand why? Is there fear, or love?

It would seem to me that over one's life, it's important to spend some time in the Dying Room to sort some of this out for yourself and with the people you love and trust, and who care for you. Talking about what's most important.

For you, maybe it is every last second of time that counts, maybe the place where you die is really important, maybe it's the people with you. Some would like everyone there, some only a single soul, some nobody at all.

I couldn't say the Dying Room is the most important room in the house. Today it doesn't feel like it. Who knows what tomorrow brings. Next week I'm back at work, part of other people's rooms, listening to their descriptions, commenting on the furniture, figuring out how best to achieve what they are after. Making sure I know it's their room, not my room.

But my room exists.

Never Too Early

by Trish McBride

'It's statistically proven that 10 out of 10 people die!'

That's how a TV ad was introduced a few decades back. It was sponsored by an evangelical church to encourage viewer reflection on their lives and preparation for inevitable judgement and afterlife. Did it have any of the desired effect? Who knows!

During a stint as chaplain in a hospice, I was surprised to find Christians who were terrified of dying in case they 'hadn't done enough' to get into heaven. And conversely, those who'd worked their way to an atheistic certainty that death was their complete end, were dying with the calm of integrity. And of course, I heard every shade of expectation and response in between. Add to that – the differing belief systems of the various faith traditions.

All food for thought and theological reflection.

As well, there are many 'Life after Life' stories of people who were clinically dead and had encounters with the Loving Light before being 'sent back' to live on. To me they ring true, even while I still find the details a mystery.

For some at the workshop, the capacity to choose the moment of death was important.

I've found healing in the stories of people who, in the presence of the Loving Light, become fully aware of their shortcomings and the effects of their actions on others. Their experience makes it easier for me to be at peace, to reconcile with the dead ones who harmed me, now that they 'get it' and understand the effects they had on my life.

Then too I see that in my turn I'll understand the impacts on others of my own behaviour of which I may now be ignorant. Is that, minus the flames, the healing process the Catholics used to call Purgatory?

I was moved by someone who works in mental health saying she believes there's a special part of heaven for those who've taken their own lives: 'They need so much extra love and healing before they're ready to join the rest.'

I attended a funeral decades ago when I was pregnant, and I suddenly saw the people gathered there as a body giving birth to our friend. Her physical remains were the placenta, of no further use now that she had been released into a new freer life. The 'labour' for her family and community had been hard and long, and there was relief as well as sadness now that it was over.

And recently I learned a new title – death doula: someone who accompanies another through their final illness as a primary support and 'midwife' for the process of dying. It's a privileged role I've had for several friends.

A US therapist, Phyllis Silverman, talks about 'continuing bonds' with those who died. She says these relationships, whatever their quality, endure and can continue to develop. This seems to me to be far more true to lived experience than 'closure' and 'getting over it'.

So many of us do have ongoing conversations with our departed ones!

I can vouch for both the continued development of relationship and the enlightenment that comes through another person dying. Many years ago, when I was on retreat, the spiritual director was firmly recommending that I go with Jesus to meet my alcoholic husband who had died suddenly several years previously. Reluctantly, but dutifully, I began the imagining. I was astounded by the interactions among the three of us, and I was re-made by the reconciliation that came about. There was a total healing I likened to heart surgery. I'd no idea I needed that, or that my husband would be a new compassionate self! And I hope my children, grandchildren and friends will still have chats with me when I'm no longer on earth.

We live in faith in a loving God for the hereafter. But all that – is beyond our current grounded day-to-day experience. In the here and now there are practical steps we can take to prepare ourselves for the distant – or possibly not – day of our own death. Like the Buddhist meditation which invites us to visualise ourselves in the casket at our funeral. And then to visualise the disintegration of our body. When we can visualise this fully, there will be a deepened appreciation of being alive in the now and of our connection to those we love.

And practical preparations are in order – essentially as an act of love for family and friends. Do we have an up-to-date will? Have we assigned Power of Attorney for care of our well-being and decisions about medical treatments and property? Have we written an Advance Care Directive on Treatment Decisions?¹

What about planning our funeral? I planned mine thirty years ago when first widowed, because I knew my children wouldn't have a clue where to start. It's been revised multiple times in relation to context, theology, language and people. And my family know how to access this information to help them make decisions when the time comes.

As suggested in Juliet Batten's *Spirited Ageing*, I delightedly compiled a list of music I'd like to die to. My family has the list and when the time comes they'll play me my beloved melodies from the classics.

It's never too early to make these preparations.

At a recent workshop entitled 'What Makes a Good Death?' we were all asked to identify factors that would make for a Good Death for ourselves. Most opted for freedom from pain, harmony in relationships, lack of extended disability, time to prepare, choices around accepting treatment or not, and a loving and respectful context.

These may or may not all be possible. But I know hospice-care maximises what is possible.

For some at the workshop, the capacity to choose the moment of death was important.

But this complex question is too big to do more than mention here – other than to say there's a strong though not universal Christian strand of resistance to voluntary euthanasia. Even the definition is open to a range of interpretations.

Then what happens?

Scientific advances in cosmology have, of necessity, modified both our theology and our spiritual geography. We can no longer envisage heaven or God as 'up there'.

So where and how we will be in God and with God has become more of a mystery.

But what I know for sure is that Divine Love goes on. There are dimensions beyond space/time – and somehow we become part of All That Is.

Alleluia!

i <http://www.advancareplanning.org.nz>

Recommended reading:

Atul Gawande, *Being Mortal, Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End*, Profile Books, London 2014.

Juliet Batten, *Spirited Ageing: cultivating the art of renewal*, Ishtar Books, 2013

Beyond Mortality

by Maggie Quinlan

What have I to fear?
In Christ I have eternal life.
Resurrection path begun;
A new world was opened to me.
Yes; I have to enter physical death.
This no longer an end, but rather a beginning.
It has lost its impact.
I look forward to a new heaven and earth,
Where there is no sin or suffering.

How different to so many others.
Those who know nothing of salvation and a future.
Those who have stopped trying;
Lost all hope of progress.
Those who have stopped feeling;
Overwhelmed by the sin, sorrow and suffering of the world;
Rendered insensitive.
Those who have stopped thinking;
Lost the desire to learn new things.
Those who have stopped repenting;
Powerless to defeat all that's wrong in their lives.
We are privileged souls saved by grace.
This is accompanied by responsibility.
Everlasting life is for all.
Look around you.
The need is great.
The harvest is ripe.
Where are the reapers?
As John the Baptist
Point the way to Christ on the Cross.
Direct attention to the life-enriching bread.
Prepare the way for Christ's return.
Anyone who hears Jesus' words
And believes in him who sent him
Has everlasting life!

The Last Word

I've mentioned it before – knowing I'd die if they didn't get the cancer out when I was eighteen. Having to face my own mortality so young was a precious gift really – a gift that's always enabled me to savour being alive with intensity. I was ALIVE! I Got to LIVE! My neck scar – was my red badge of courage. Covering it up was out of the question.

Mortality did manage to hit me like a freight train though, when I realised much later – that nothing could protect me from experiencing the pain of grief at the loss of someone I love. For grief is the unavoidable cost of loving! Even loving life! All that being said, it is my deepest conviction that God's love is stronger than death!

I'm deeply humbled and grateful to all those who contributed to this Summer edition of Refresh on Mortality – especially those facing their own frailty as they put pen to paper.

Blessings

Diane [dianegw@actrix.co.nz]

Winter 2018 Refresh theme 'Seize life!'

Deadline March 28, 2018

'For You are the source of all life and goodness.'

If we mean what we pray, then how do we find that place of God's presence which is life in all its fullness? How does the contemplative life help us 'seize life' and make the most of each present moment – so we are neither anchored in regret nor fearful of the future? How do we lay down those things which prevent us from fully entering the spaciousness of life in the presence of God? What journey did we take to get there? How do we hold onto life in all its fullness even when confronted with the world's darkness? How have you experienced being God's beloved? Did that feel like LIFE to you?

Guidelines for writers – please, please, please!

keep contributions to fewer than 2000 words
use single quotation marks
be conversational in style
use conjunctions wherever possible
use endnotes instead of footnotes
use inclusive language wherever possible
ensure any images you send are larger than 2MB.

SGM News

Jane Wilkinson has agreed to be 'interim Convenor' following the death of our beloved Mike Wright in August.

A lot has happened since the previous Summer Refresh arrived at your place.

Back then SGM was still looking for a new National Coordinator for the Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme. And once Fran Francis was found, we turned our attention to appointing an Assistant Coordinator to lead second-year participants through the next steps of formation, onto their final project and celebration of completion. We're delighted to announce the appointment of David Crawley to this vital role.

David's experience of the formation programme is deep – due to long involvement as a supervisor, SDFP workshop facilitator, and his own formation within our framework. He has long been a member of SGM Workgroup and a practising spiritual director. David lectures in spiritual formation and pastoral care, and was recently ordained an Anglican priest. We haven't quite worked out how to fit in his saxophone playing and former life as a math geek, but we feel sure they'll come in handy somewhere in this varied position!

'BEHOLD' UPDATE

After a natural delay following Mike's sad loss, SGM Workgroup will shortly be interviewing applicants for our new outreach Coordinator for the 'Behold' project. We're committed to advancing the vision which unfolded as a result of our 'Road Show' in 2015. Our goal is to offer some of the excellent resources from our Spiritual Directors' Formation Programme to a wider audience. We hope to make an appointment before Christmas, so work can begin following our March meeting.

Look for news of this in the winter edition of Refresh or the SGM website!

SDFP Special Projects on the web!

Benedictine Hospitality and Spiritual Direction - Anne Cave

Body Awareness - Allowing Our Bodies To Lead Us In Prayer - Emma Alldrige

Bridges for Evangelicals: Journeying into Contemplative Spirituality and Spiritual Direction - Elsa McInnes

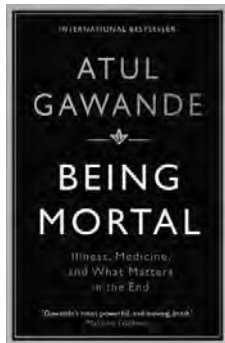
To access: <http://www.sgm.org.nz/spiritual-direction-special-interest-projects.html>



© Diane Gilliam-Weeks

It's not often we get all three present and past Formation Programme Coordinators together but we managed when we honoured Mike in Dunedin! L to R Sue Pickering, Barbara McMillan and Fran Francis.

Books for the Contemplative Journey



Being Mortal

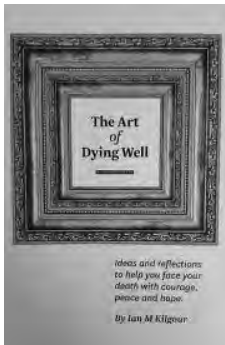
Illness, Medicine and What Matters in the End

by Atul Gawande

Profile Books Ltd

Reviewer Barbara Sampson

Atul Gawande is an Indian-born surgeon practising in USA. He laments the American health system that denies the inevitable progression of mortality and keeps pumping chemicals into patients in the hope that this will buy more time and thus make life 'better' for both patients and their families. Rather, he says, we should be asking two questions at every stage of dying: 'What do you value?' and 'What is important to you?' The ultimate goal, he says, is not a good death, but a good life – all the way to the very end. For the spiritual director accompanying someone on their journey of life, as for the doctor at the bedside of a dying patient, these are key questions. In a new season of growth and opportunity, or a time of change and transition, or the onset of what could be a terminal illness, these two questions go to the very heart of the matter. This book, with its sub-title 'Illness, Medicine, and What Matters in the End', is a must-read. Trade in your latest device or your new jacket and purchase it!



The Art of Dying Well

by Ian Kilgour

Reviewer Roger Hey

This isn't a book about death as such – it's much more personal – it's about your death, and mine, and how we might prepare for it. There are plenty of writings on death, but nothing, of course, on you or me, and little on how we approach our dying. Few of us think closely about our death until it's forced on us. New Zealand culture gives us ways to avoid it, denial is widespread and we employ soft language to keep our feelings under control. Ian Kilgour writes from years of pastoral experience. Beginning with practical matters and moving on to celebrating significant people and places, he then invites us to look back, to see our place in the large picture of life. And forward to thoughtful reflections on dying from world faith traditions. There is plenty here to warm the heart and satisfy the mind.

Get the book from kilgours@xtra.co.nz.



My wide white bed

by Trish Harris

Landing Press 2017

My wide white bed navigates the currents of a hospital, through the swells and up draughts of recovery, from the moorings of a wide white bed. The poems are short, whimsical, sometimes humorous, and encouraging – always with a thoughtful undertone. From nurses to chaplains, from visitors to cleaning staff, these poems bring to life a patient experience in a prolonged hospital stay. Well-known GP and Poet Glenn Colquhoun says of *My wide white bed*: 'The book is a medicine itself – and shows how crucial imagination is to being well. Less often sparked by angels than bedpans, Trish Harris' patient writes by noticing and thinking – to hold the stare of whatever's looking back at us.' This book will appeal to poetry readers and those new to poetry. <https://landingpress.wordpress.com>



Sanctuary by the Sea

by Val Roberts

Growing up in Nairobi, holidays by the sea took a whole day's journey – a special family tradition. Today, Val Roberts lives close to the sea – which speaks to her of life and God. It is there she ponders and prays and pours out her heart. A limited edition of poems and photos are now available in *Sanctuary by the Sea*. A useful resource for Spiritual Directors and others for reflection and growth. For copies contact val.roberts@xtra.co.nz



A Celebration of Life: Collected Poems

By Meg Hartfield

Meg's poems flow from her deep faith and a longing for a peaceful world. Poems in the first half of the book, *Light of the World*, are a retelling of the story of Jesus' life. Meg Hartfield's poems flow from her deep faith and a longing for a peaceful world. Starting with the Word and the nativity, then onwards to the Cross, Resurrection and Pentecost, Meg's poems draw us into the mystery of God among us. Taken together they form a new gospel, a new sharing of the good news, for readers today. Meg takes us inside the heads and hearts of Bible characters to find they were just like us: brave and afraid, striving to live well but often missing the point, capable of loving and of hating, of violence and of gentleness. She brings alive these dramatic stories that point us to the shining light of God's love for us, made human in Jesus. The book ends with thirteen poems focusing on Peace – exploring the big picture of war and international conflict, and the small, everyday things we can do to create a peaceful community and world.

A Passerby by Sue Pickering

Written on the death of Mike Wright 3 August, 2017

I'm just a passerby.
Fading is the ego's clamour
to be noticed,
the hope of having
my contribution to the world
etched in stone or
somehow writ large in
the minds of those I leave behind.

Mortality has crashed into my life
with Mike's sudden, unbelievable death,
and I'm confronted by the reality
that there are exciting plans
I may not see come to fruition,
and little ones yet unborn
for whom I may be only a fading photograph
in a hallway, a name in a whakapapa.

The ideas to explore, the books yet to write
may remain just that: potential, not product.
The big hope that what I am offering will
make a sweeping difference
is, like the mist, melting.
Instead, creeping sweetly into the light,
is the truth of my littleness,
the truth of my passing through,
the truth that I am cherished even so.

And there is a certain peacefulness,
even relief in this knowing.
I do not have to strive or struggle
to make things happen,
but right the daily wrongs,
receive the gifts of grace, and
hand over, hour by hour,
what is and what shall be,
to the one who made me
and to whom I shall return.

All is well, and all manner of thing shall be well.



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Contributors

Mike Riddell is a novelist, playwright, and screenwriter living peacefully in a small enclave of the Waikato. A former Baptist minister turned Catholic layman, he enjoys cooking, reading, silence and the company of friends.

Andrew Norton is poet blogger Finding Cadence, soul photographer, and leadership motivator. A former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, Andrew recently confronted months of chemotherapy and prevailed. He's inspired by nature, the ups and downs of life and a deep spirituality. Andrew is on leave from his role as senior minister at St Columba @ Botany. He and Sue have four adult children.

Sally Carter is the minister at St Paul's Presbyterian Church in Napier. Her spiritual guides at present are Henri Nouwen, Richard Rohr and her three daughters.

Ana Lisa de Jong considers herself a poet and writer first, and chaplaincy administrator second. She lives in the beautiful North West of Auckland and prizes her glimpse of the Upper Harbour from her kitchen window. Poetry is written at the kitchen bench, in the car, on the beach, in her lunch break, whenever inspiration strikes. Her fourth book of poetry 'Heart Psalms' is presently taking shape. Ana Lisa writes at livingtreepoetry.com

Margaret Gwynn does yoga and tai chi and looks after a labyrinth. She loves to read, dance and garden, and is an active member of the Green Party.

Lesley Ayers lives in Tauranga, with her husband John. Walking (in the bush, on a beach, in the city) provides her with much needed work/life/spirit-balance. She delights in the wonder of God's world experienced through the eyes of young grandchildren.

Ed Duggan is an accountant turned counsellor who is trying to reduce his working hours to be more contemplative. He lives in Palmerston North with his wife Ronni. He was baptised a Presbyterian, went to an Anglican school, attended a Baptist youth group and spent three decades in the Catholic Church, so is thoroughly denominationally confused. He currently worships and fellowships at a New life fellowship in Ashhurst.

Anna Johnstone, a lover of the Trinity, her lovely man, Kerry and all things creative, is excited to have come to the last stages of her sixth book, *The Last Walk*, about the latter part of life and dying. Available early December. See <http://annajohnstone.com> for details.

Andrew Dunn lives and works at Oasis, Albany, and enjoys their covenanted bush which adds to the wild link between The Ark in the Park in the Waitakeres and the Tiritiri Matangi Island Sanctuary in the Hauraki Gulf.

Martin Stewart ministers with the team at The Village Church in Christchurch. His interests include photography, writing, bass playing, and pottering on a rural property with Anne, his wife, when they get there.

Jo Anastasiadis is a spiritual director and Children's Church worker, who has just discovered the simple delight of being a grandparent. A born and bred Wellingtonian, she revels in being in God's creation, writing the odd poem and spending time creatively with God.

Brian Ensor is the Director of Palliative Care at the Mary Potter Hospice in Wellington. For the past 30 odd years he has been working in palliative care, having originally trained in General Practice. He has spent many years in and around the Presbyterian Church, and is currently involved in a less formal group meeting regularly to wonder about Life.

Trish McBride is a Wellington spiritual director, writer, quilter and grandmother of 19. She belongs to St Andrew's on The Terrace. She has contributed to five Catholic-based theology books and had articles published recently in NZ Quilter and Presence, the Spiritual Directors International Journal. She delights in family, friends and hearing stories.

Maggie Quinlan is a part-time GP and Pastoral Care Coordinator at Papakura Wesleyan Church. She has two children and three grandchildren. She enjoys the outdoors, looking after her menagerie of animals, dancing, singing, mosaicing, poetry writing and photography.

Sue Pickering continues looking out of her window at the Tasman Sea's changes, as her own life adjusts to ageing. Sue continues with priestly ministry, writing, and spiritual direction, enjoying the company of her family, occasional quilting, slow piano practice, and tentative Pilates!

