

Sunday 10th May 2026. Benefice Holy Communion,
Oswaldkirk

Today marks the end of “Dying Matters Week”, which takes place across the country every year at this time and is organised by Hospice UK. The NHS, palliative care services, and voluntary services and hospices come together to try and raise awareness and break down the taboo of talking about death and dying because death, dying and bereavement affect us all.

In my opinion, from the perspective of the church Dying Matters Week presents an opportunity to reach out to those who are approaching end of life at home or in care, and to promote pastoral care to those who are grieving. Tomorrow will be our next Bereavement Café at Beadlam Grange where I will welcome again the members of the group, some of whom have been coming since the first one back in September. It has become clearer as the meetings have gone the value of just coming together to share stories and form friendships.

Why should the church do this some might ask? Shouldn't it only be interested in those who attend on a Sunday and contribute to the collection plate? I would reply emphatically “No!” Jesus showed us something that offers something to those who are dying and grieving and that precious something is Hope. In today's gospel reading, Jesus makes a very powerful promise that should fill us all, whatever our circumstances, with hope: *“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you.”* Jesus promises He has gone to His Father's house to prepare a place for us, but he promises to come again. That promise should fill us with hope, with a confident hope, not a hope that we can control and change our minds about, but rely on and trust because it is the true hope.

In our First Reading, Paul is challenged by the Athenians to share the reason for his hope. Paul has looked around Athens, and he has found a city that is clearly longing for hope. They have built altars and shrines to every god imaginable – even one to an unknown god, just to cover all their bases. They are *desperate* to please the gods, and they are searching frantically for hope. Paul’s speech echoes the theme of Dying Matters Week and points out that God has “allotted the times of our existence.” God has made it so that we know that we are mortal, and we know that we will die. Paul shares in his sermon that he went through their city and looked carefully at the objects of their worship. If Paul were to do that today, what might he conclude were objects of our false worship and our false hopes? What other altars and shrines would he find, tempting us to place our hope in things that will only disappoint? Technology and science? Wealth? Health? Humanism? The question to ask of any of these things is: Have they died for us, and been raised from the dead? If not, they are not true hopes but false hopes.

Our calling is to keep hope focused on Jesus, and to rejoice, even in the midst of our trials, for we have been given a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This hope is true, it is real, and it is worth our defending if we are willing, to obey the commands of Jesus and love His love to the world.

As the late Abbot of Ampleforth Abbey, Cardinal Basil Hume put it,

“The great gift of Easter is hope - Christian hope which makes us have that confidence in God, in his ultimate triumph, and in his goodness and love, which nothing can shake.”

This is the true hope Jesus promises so may each of us be filled with this hope today – this *sure and certain* hope – and always be ready to share it.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

