

5th May 2020

Death

“In the midst of life we are in death.”

The Book of Common Prayer, The Burial of the Dead

I've wanted to share something on death since this Covid-19 crisis descended. So I've gone to the 1662 Book of Common Prayer for this truism: *In the midst of life we are in death*. From the day we are born, death is inevitable. Benjamin Franklin was right when he wrote in a letter to friend in 1789, *In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes*. Right now, the reality of death takes prominence. But, though we would like to believe otherwise, it was ever thus ...

So, if death is inevitable, why do we seek to build permanence into our lives so much? Life is transient. We are given the gift of life, not the years we assume. If that is true, might we learn to live with *impermanence*, make good use of every precious moment and not leave things off to the days, weeks or years which may not be available to us?

John Donne, the writer of “No man is an island ...” wrote in 1662, *Death comes equally to us all, and makes us all equal when it comes*. In my hospice, two men were in the same ward, one an Advocate, the other a Servitor who lit the fires in the Advocate's Library. These two men shared a journey to death in a deeper way than they would have shared anything in life. Death made them equal as it came for them both.

Zam Walker, a remarkable woman with whom I shared membership of the Iona Community, led a week with me in Iona Abbey for cancer sufferers when she herself was undergoing treatment for cancer. She often quoted a mantra associated with the Native American cultures but which she made her own: *Today is a good day to die*. Zam is no longer with us, but her mantra remains with me as a vital message as to how I might live, facing the reality of my own death.

Death, the powerful teacher. Death, the inevitable leveller. Death, the great equaliser. Death, the lesson for every day well lived.

A prayer for today

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of death, I will fear no evil ...”

Lord, give me your peace and blessing when that valley becomes my pathway. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

Also available at <https://swallowsnestnet.wordpress.com>