

7th July 2025

Dots

"You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking backwards. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future."

Steve Jobs, address at Stanford University, 2005

I attended the funeral of a friend recently, conducted by a Civil Celebrant. The funeral, while not entirely to my taste, was delivered well – even though there was no singing, the poetry wasn't great, and the tribute, while full and well-received, was too anecdotal for me. But given my experience of some "evangelically" humanist funerals I've attended, I was pleased when this celebrant, introducing a photomontage with music, said, "For those to whom prayer matters, this might be a time to offer prayers for John's life, and as a support for his family." I liked that!

But three other phrases also caught my attention. The first: "John has gone on before us ..." "Gone on"? Where? How? What is this "going on" concept for a non-religious celebrant? For me, it's about eternity, an idea of everlasting life, such as the "heaven" we talk of. But for the celebrant to hint at this? There was no Steve Jobs' "connect the dots", looking forward beyond death, as I'd have done. Was it significant that he couldn't completely let go of the possibility, with his "gone on before"?

The second: "He will be reunited with Jean" (his late wife). What is this "reunited" idea for a civil celebrant? For me, it would be about the "cloud of witnesses", the "blessed departed", the "Church Invisible". But "reunited", for a non-religious celebrant? It made me wonder ...

The third: "together with those we love". I get that. "Together" in memory with *all* who have died, and maybe that's what the celebrant meant. But with the language used, even a non-religious man couldn't completely detach himself from the concept, the possibility, even the hope, of what might happen after death. Still "together" it seems ...

Reflecting on my friend's life at his funeral, we got lots of "connect the dots" looking backwards. I appreciated that. But maybe even a civil celebrant, who set out his stall to make it clear that there were no *further* dots to connect, couldn't quite stop believing that "you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future" as well.

A prayer for today

Backwards? God's blessing. Now? God's blessing. The future? God's blessing. Enough?