



ST. BENEDICTS' ANGLICAN CHURCH

# *Ashes to Ashes*

Exploring a Biblical understanding of Mortality,  
Death, and Eternity.

ADULT CATECHESIS  
SUNDAYS AT 10:30 AM

## WEEK I: MORTALITY & DEATH

*Dixi, custodiam. Psalm xxxix* (Read The Burial Office, 324 BCP)

### Modernity And Death.

**There is no answer for death in a society such as ours.** We have found ways through technology and science to ‘delay death.’ Celebration has replaced lament (what happened to funerals?). Modern Western culture has tried valiantly to domesticate and marginalize death, both by taming it through fictionalized representations in movies and TV shows, and by keeping the real thing out of sight. Inevitable and uncontrollable events related to weather, health crisis, or economic hardship usually surface this hard truth: *few of us have been properly prepared for the reality of our own mortality.* We are born to die; death is inevitable, which is why many find it terrifying.

### Death In Art And Poetry.

**Art often possesses the uncanny ability to speak straight to the soul.** One theme that has been forever present in art, is that of death. Artistic mediums often express what mere words simply cannot.

***Power of Death, William Holbrook Beard, 1889.*** Death comes for even the most powerful of man and beast, leaves them nothing but corporeal husks, drained of all life. William Holbrook Beard’s *Power of Death* perfectly encapsulates this sentiment. *A tiger fights with every ounce of survival instinct it possesses, but will inevitably join the other majestic wild animals that lay in eternal slumber at Death’s feet. Inevitability of death.* (Heb 9:27)



***“The Conqueror Worm,”*** by **Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)**. A group of angels, “drowned in tears,” are watching a play in which various characters chase about the stage, depicting “much of Madness, and more of Sin, and Horror the soul of the plot.” Presently, the horrid figure of a worm appears to eat up all the characters.

Out—out are the lights—out all! And, over each quivering form, The curtain, a funeral pall, Comes down with the rush of a storm, While the angels, all pallid and wan, Uprising, unveiling, affirm That the play is the tragedy, “Man,” And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.

***Death and Life, Gustav Klimt 1915.*** However splendid the joys of life can be, death is always waiting in wings. Our loves, hopes, family, friends, faith and security will all someday have an end. Gustav Klimt’s famed *Death and Life* is a breathtakingly beautiful representation of this contrast. A rosy-cheeked woman clutches a young infant with a look of such utter contentedness, while Death looks on with sickening anticipation. The colors used in the ‘life’ side of the painting are vivid and warm, the colors on the ‘death’ side, dark and cool, giving the painting an almost-tangible feeling of ambivalence. **Transitoriness of life.** (Ps. 39:5-)



***“Because I Could Not Stop for Death,” by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886).***

Because I could not stop for Death – He kindly stopped for me – The Carriage held but just Ourselves – And Immortality We slowly drove – He knew no haste. And I had put away My labor and my leisure too, For His Civility – We passed the School, where Children strove At Recess – in the Ring – We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain – We passed the Setting Sun – Or rather – He passed us – The Dews drew quivering and chill – For only Gossamer, my Gown – My Tippet – only Tulle – We paused before a House that seemed A Swelling of the Ground – The Roof was scarcely visible – The Cornice – in the Ground – Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet Feels shorter than the Day I first surmised the Horses’ Heads Were toward Eternity

***The Triumph of Death, Peter Breuger the Elder, 1562.*** This sixteenth century painting, by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, depicts a tableau in which a skeletal army brings humanity to its knees. From peasant to king, no soul is immune from the utter destruction Death’s troops wreak. Even an unclothed wretch who seeks refuge in a hollowed tree trunk, finds himself impaled by a lance. And in the upper left-hand corner of the panel painting, a pair of skeletons can be seen ringing a set of bells. The death-knell of the world is being rung out over an earth scorched and spent. **Death shows no partiality.** (Ps 49:2)



*“Elegy in a Country Churchyard,”* by Thomas Gray (1716-1771). The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow’r, And all that beauty, all that wealth e’er gave, Awaits alike th’ inevitable hour. The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

*Saint Francis in Prayer, Caravaggio, 1606.* While gazing upon Saint Francis meditating upon mortality, we find that we ourselves are doing the same. fittingly hangs in the Capuchin Crypt museum located beneath the Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini church in Rome. A series of small chapels beneath contain the bones and mummified remains of an estimated 5,000 friars and other Christians. Far from being a macabre spectacle, the Capuchin order believes the remains of former friars are a silent and poignant reminder of our mortality and the passage of life on Earth.) Facing our Mortality.



## **The Church Tethers Life To Mortality.**

**Historically, it has been the church's responsibility to make present the reality of mortality and death.** Yet, this seems to have all but disappeared in the modern church. This was rarely lost on earlier generations of Christians.

**Our liturgy is at odds with modernity,** Take, for example, the Book of Common Prayer's funeral liturgy which speaks powerfully in a manner foreign to our own culture: *Man that is born of woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?* (Burial of the Dead, 332 BCP)

That is a liturgy **at odds with today's culture** and possibly **at odds with the expectations of today's church.**

**In past times people did not go to church to be made happy; they went to have their misery explained to them.** If the Book of Common Prayer is a guide, that is understandable: Life in the sixteenth century was miserable, and it ended in death.

**People wanted the tools to face reality, not distractions to make them feel good about themselves.** Our lives may be, on average, more comfortable than those of our ancestors, but that is a temporary state of affairs and our end is just the same as theirs.

So, grim as it sounds, **the task of the church isn't to distract us from reality,** or focus attention on temporal issues, which come and go, but rather against the "age of analgesics": the age of escapism, entertainment, and the ease with which one can construct alternative realities, and the ever increasing acceptance of utter fictions. **We must live soberly in this world.**

### **Could Mortality Be God's Gift?**

**Modern culture sees aging and mortality merely as foes to be overcome.** If medicine succeeds in making man immortal, or even much longer-lived, the *mortalists* argue, much that makes human life worthwhile will be lost.

The wisdom of Homer or Tolkein illustrate a vision of mortality's benefits. In Tolkein's world of *The Lord of the Rings*, immortality and long life lead even the

noblest creatures to a spiritual dead end, or to outright corruption (eg. The Wizard Saurumon comes to mind).

The virtues of mortality are most obvious in the great paradox of the book: that the simple and very mortal Hobbits are the only ones who can resist the Ring's seduction and destroy it.

Seemingly the most insignificant and lowliest race of all, (Hobbits) they spend their (relatively) short lives in small pursuits like gardening, pipe smoking, and crafting ale. They have little use for lofty "elvish" ideas.

As most characters in *The Lord of the Rings* remark, they are unlikely saviors of the world. In fact, their lowly mortality may be their greatest asset. (Ps 90:12-14)

**The church is certainly given to help people to live, but to live in the shadow of mortality.** She must set this earthly realm in the greater context of eternity. She is to prepare people through her preaching, her liturgy, her psalmody, and her sacraments to realize that death is, yes, a terrible, terrifying reality we must all someday face, but that the suffering of this world—or indeed, this passing superficial prosperity many of us enjoy—are but light and momentary ephemera compared to the eternal weight of glory that is to come.

### Understanding Death Theologically.

**Man was not created to experience Death.** Very Good! Man was created in the image of God, to enjoy unending and complete communion with Him.

**Death is a consequence of sin.** Death entered the world on account of man's sin (Cf. *Gen* 2:17; 3:3; 3:19; *Wis* 1:13; *Rom* 5:12; 6:16, 21, 23; 7:5.)

**The results of the fall were catastrophic.** First, Adam and Eve experienced an overwhelming sense of shame. "Having eaten of the forbidden fruit their eyes were **opened**, and they realized they were **naked**; so they sowed fig leaves together made coverings for themselves."<sup>1</sup> H.C. Leupold's comment on the fig leaves is particularly insightful. He writes, "*That this sense of shame should concentrate itself on that portion of the body which is marked by the organs of generation, no doubt has its deeper reason in this that man instinctively feels that the very*

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<sup>1</sup> Hoekema, 133, cites H.C. Leupold.

*fountain and source of human life is contaminated by sin.*"<sup>2</sup> After **shame**, they experienced **fear** as evidenced in their hiding from God out of fear of his wrath and certain punishment.<sup>3</sup> God judged the serpent, the woman, and the man. By the man's actions the very ground was cursed.<sup>4</sup>

**Original sin brought death upon Adam, Eve, and all subsequent humanity**<sup>5</sup>—a death they were not created to have experienced.

**Even though man's nature is mortal God had destined him not to die.** Man was created with the capability of dying, as he did after the fall, but was not destined to do so as fallen humans experience now. **Had Adam not sinned, he would have grown full of years without decrepitude, and whenever God pleased, pass from mortality to immortality without the medium of death.** St. Augustine: Had Adam refrained from sin, would have naturally passed into immortality.<sup>6</sup> **So man was created a mortal being who did not have to experience death.**

**Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and entered the world as a consequence of sin (Gen 6:3).** "Bodily death, from which man would have been immune had he not sinned" is thus, "the last enemy" of man left to be conquered (1 Cor 15:26; Mk 14:33-34; Heb 5:7-8.)

**Death (θάνατος) is the separating of the soul from the body.** This is unnatural, for man was intended to enjoy life with God in the garden forever.

**Death is the end of earthly life.** We are born, live, grow old, and die. Death seems like the natural end of life.

### **The Meaning Of Christian Death.**

**Death is transformed by Christ.** Jesus, the Son of God, also himself suffered the death that is part of the human condition. Yet, despite his anguish as he faced death, he accepted it in an act of complete and free submission to his Father's will. The obedience of Jesus has transformed the curse of death into a blessing.

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<sup>2</sup> Genesis 3:10.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 3:17—19.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 2:3; Romans 5:12.

<sup>5</sup> The idea of the man's *State of Justice* originates in the writings of St. Augustine of Hippo.

<sup>6</sup> St. Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants*, II.2, Fathers of the Church.



**Because of Christ, Christian death has a positive meaning (Phil 1:21).**

What is essentially new about Christian death is this: through Baptism, the Christian has already "died with Christ" sacramentally, in order to live a new life; **and if we die in Christ's grace, physical death completes this "dying with Christ" and so completes our incorporation into him in his redeeming act:**

*2 Tim 2:8 -13, if we have died with him, we will also slive with him; 12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.”*

It is better for me to die in (eis) Christ Jesus than to reign over the ends of the earth. Him it is I seek - who died for us. Him it is I desire - who rose for us. I am on the point of giving birth... Let me receive pure light; when I shall have arrived there, then shall I be a man.<sup>7</sup>

### **In Death, God Calls Man To Himself.**

**Therefore the Christian can be desirous of death (Phil 1:23).** “I want to see God and, in order to see him, I must die.”<sup>8</sup>

For the early church, the threshold of death was a way of access rather than a barrier between the two communities (between the church in heaven and that on earth). The dead linked heaven and earth.

Their families would unite with their beloved over a memorial meal at their graves, easing their grief in recreating the family intimacy, only transiently ruptured. Every anniversary was a celebration of the larger family in heaven.

Death was the door through which they would finally attain God and enjoy the full communion of the saints.

**The Church encourages us to prepare ourselves for the hour of our death.** In the ancient litany of the saints, for instance, she has us pray: "From a sudden and unforeseen death, deliver us, O Lord".

**Death is the end of man's earthly pilgrimage,** of the time of grace and mercy which God offers him so as to work out his earthly life in keeping with the divine

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<sup>7</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, Ad. Rom., 6, 1-2

<sup>8</sup> St. Teresa of Avila, *Life*, Chapter 1.

plan, and to decide his ultimate destiny. When "the single course of our earthly life" is completed, we shall not return to other earthly lives: "It is appointed for men to die once." There is no "reincarnation" after death. **Therefore, mortality pressurizes the call of the Gospel upon all to repentance and salvation.**

“Every action of yours, every thought, should be those of one who expects to die before the day is out. Death would have no great terrors for you if you had a quiet conscience. . . Then why not keep clear of sin instead of running away from death? If you aren't fit to face death today, it's very unlikely you will be tomorrow...”<sup>9</sup>

“Praised are you, my Lord, for our sister bodily Death, from whom no living man can escape. Woe on those who will die in mortal sin! Blessed are they who will be found in your most holy will, for the second death will not harm them.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas A Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, 1.23.1.

<sup>10</sup> St. Francis of Assisi, *Canticle of Creatures*.

## WEEK III: LAMENT

(Presented by Kimberly Hiles)

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN, FOR THEY SHALL BE COMFORTED.” (MATT. 5:4)

### Introduction.

Each one of us comes into the world the same way—with a cry. We enter wailing. Although none of us remembers the moment, the first sound we utter after leaving the safe and protected confines of our mother’s womb is a loud protest. *To cry is human.* So, we make our entrance crying, and it never stops.

The crying continues because the world is broken.

We are not the only part of the created order expressing sorrow. Romans 8:22 tells us that the entire creation groans.

St. Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit “groaning” within us, as we ourselves groan within the pain of the whole creation.

While tears and sorrow are part of our humanity, there is an often-neglected prayer language in the Bible for our journey through a broken world, and it is the language of lament. **Lament is not the same as crying. it is different. and it is uniquely christian.**

Psalm 11 reads like this: to the choir director. Of david. “In the Lord I take refuge. How then can you say to me, “Flee like a bird to your mountain. for look, the wicked bend their bows; they set their arrows against the strings to shoot from the shadows at the upright in heart. when the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?”

In other words, “when the bottom falls out, what are the righteous to do?” I began with psalm 11, but I could have started with psalm 10 or 12 or 13!

What are the psalms? The psalms were the songbook for god’s people. It encompasses the joys & sorrows, and the struggles and triumphs of life. it contains almost every relatable life event, from the depths to the heights.

One out of three Psalms is a lament—a song sung in the minor key. Think about that—one third of the official songbook of Israel wrestles with pain. and one entire book was written as a memorial to lament (lamentations, which is made up of five

poems of lament). Just think about that. now, Why do you suppose that is? Maybe because there is value in remembering. and maybe because our individual laments inform our collective grief.

There is a very important TRUTH that we must remember about lament:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” 5 And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true. (Rev 21:1-5).

Sometimes the fullness of a thing is best described by what it lacks, and that is the case here. One day there will be no crying, no mourning, no pain—just think of it. And perhaps one of the most remarkable things will be absence of lament...that 1/3 of the psalms in the songbook—those songs of sorrow—will not be sung. So, lament is something that we experience because of the fall, of sin, of the brokenness of the world. A way God has given us to navigate grief and injustice and the fallenness of man.

let’s stop right here and get a working definition for lament. lament can be defined as a loud cry, a howl or a passionate expression of grief. lament is the prayer language for God’s people as we live and move and have our being in a world marred by sin, and Broken. and it is how we talk to God about our sorrow and fear and disappointment as we renew our hope in his sovereign care. It is a prayer in pain that leads to trust. and as NT Wright says, “lament is what happens when people ask “why?” and don’t get an answer.

the practice of lament is woven into the fabric of biblical tradition, not just an outlet for our frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening or why. The mystery of the biblical story is that god also laments.

Where do we see god lament in scripture? 1. god grieved in genesis over the violent wickedness of the human creatures he made. He was devastated when his chosen people, Israel, turned away from him. and when god came to his people in person – the story of Jesus is meaningless unless that is what it’s about—he wept at the tomb of his friend, lazarus.

When the bottom falls out, what are the righteous to do? jesus wept. god grieved. the prophets wailed and sat down appalled. we are to lament.

And that seems very relevant if we consider the times and culture in which we live. people have been disconnected from each other, kept from gathering together. Deaths are increasing, many untimely and unanticipated. And remember what Father michael said last week—that People want the tools to face reality, not just distractions to make them feel good. I am here to testify that Lament is one of the most practical, helpful tools you can learn and teach all your people because it teaches us how to hold the tension between two very present tensions: life is hard and god is good.

1. A prayer: our expressed grief directed toward god, asking him to intervene, pleading with him to pay attention and act on our behalf in pain: lament happens right in the middle of it. we do not wait until the cloud lifts or the storm passes before we cry out. we do not stiff-arm god or give him the silent treatment because he hurt our feelings; we pray in the pain. that leads: lament, like liturgy, leads us somewhere—we don’t swirl around the cul-de-sac of sorrow. lament helps us move through our grief and pain to trust: if we get to the end of lament and we do not trust god more and our faith has not deepened, then we have not finished with our lament. we have just been sad.

2. PROOF OF RELATIONSHIP: JUST LIKE ISRAEL DID IN THE PSALMS, WE BRING OUR LAMENT TO GOD ON THE BASIS OF OUR COVENANT WITH HIM, ASKING HIM, AS OUR FATHER, TO ACT ACCORDINGLY. (THINK OF THE LORD’S PRAYER, which Christ Himself modeled for us and gave us as an example). JUST AS OUR CHILDREN ASK US FOR WHAT THEY NEED, SO WE DO THE SAME WITH GOD.

THE REVERSE OF THIS SCENE IS TRAGICALLY DESCRIBED BY DR. RUSSEL MOORE IN HIS BOOK ADOPTED FOR LIFE. HE DESCRIBES GOING TO AN ORPHANAGE IN RUSSIA PURSUING THE possibility of

ADOPTION. THE SILENCE FROM THE NURSERY WAS EERIE. THE BABIES IN THE CRIBS NEVER CRIED. NOT BECAUSE THEY NEVER NEEDED ANYTHING, BUT BECAUSE THEY HAD LEARNED THAT NO ONE CARED ENOUGH TO ANSWER. CHILDREN WHO ARE CONFIDENT OF THE LOVE OF A CAREGIVER CRY. FOR THE CHRISTIAN, OUR LAMENT, WHEN TAKEN TO OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN, IS PROOF OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, OUR CONNECTION to OUR GREAT CAREGIVER.

3. A PARTICIPATION IN THE PAIN OF OTHERS: What Lament forms in us is not only FOR us. It shapes us to more fully, in a Christ-like way, love and serve others. LAMENT IS NOT ONLY FOR THE SUFFERING; IT IS FOR SOLIDARITY WITH THE SUFFERING. WE LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR WHEN WE ALLOW THEIR EXPERIENCE OF PAIN TO BECOME THE SUBSTANCE OF OUR PRAYER. THIS IS, AFTERALL, WHAT JESUS DID FOR US.

An important function of the liturgy is to make us more attentive and responsive to those around us, to form in us what St Paul calls ‘the mind of Christ’, so that we can be sent out to express that mind of Christ in our attentive dealing with the needs of individuals and the pressing issues of our society.

We find communion when we pray the psalms of lament, alone or in our congregations. By voicing the psalms, we are caught up into that cosmic chorus that is the cry of the Church. This is part of what it means to be in the communion of saints: we join our voices with David, with the ancient Israelites, with Augustine and Athanasius and the early church, with the whole of Christ’s bride, who, in various times and various places, has lifted these same prayers. Our lament becomes a line in the polyphonic symphony of the Church’s song. Thus, we are never alone when we say, “Hear my prayer, O Lord, and let my crying come unto thee” (Ps. 102:1).

4. ONE OF THE MOST THEOLOGICALLY INFORMED ACTIONS A PERSON CAN MAKE: LAMENT INTERPRETS THE WORLD THROUGH A BIBLICAL LENS.

- LAMENTS HOLD THE TENSION BETWEEN “LIFE IS HARD” AND “GOD IS GOOD”

- NOT ONLY DO CHRISTIANS KNOW GOD’S PROMISES IN SCRIPTURE BUT THROUGH LAMENT, THOSE PROMISES ARE INTEGRATED INTO OUR BELIEF! Job: My ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen You!
- NOT ONLY DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE IN GOD’S POWER TO DELIVER, BUT LAMENT FORCES US TO PUT ALL OUR HOPE IN IT (HOPE AGAINST HOPE—A LIVING HOPE!)
- LAMENT FORCES US TO TALK TO GOD RATHER THAN GETTING ANGRY OR BITTER
- LAMENT POSTURES US TO LAY OUT OUR SOUL BEFORE GOD AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN
- LAMENT TURNS US TOWARD GOD WHEN SORROW TEMPTS US TO RUN AWAY
- LAMENT REMINDS US OF THE LONG ARC OF THE PLAN OF GOD: CREATION, FALL, REDEMPTION & RESTORATION, OR LIFE, DEATH, BURIAL AND RESURRECTION

The habitual and liturgical prayer of lament is cathartic, it purifies our emotions or—as Augustine would phrase it—helps order our loves. This does not guarantee that we will escape future suffering, but rather, that we might learn to suffer better. We might even learn to love our suffering, as Paul did, because it somehow, mysteriously, draws us nigh unto God.

## WEEK III: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I DIE?

### *Claudio, Measure for Measure, Act 3.1*

*Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;  
To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;  
This sensible warm motion to become  
A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit  
To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside  
In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;  
To be imprison'd in the viewless winds,  
And blown with restless violence round about  
The pendent world; or to be worse than worst  
Of those that lawless and incertain thought  
Imagine howling: 'tis too horrible!  
The weariest and most loathed worldly life  
That age, ache, penury and imprisonment  
Can lay on nature is a paradise  
To what we fear of death.*

Claudio to Isabella: “Aye but to die and go we know not where?” Fear not only evokes mystery but curiosity and sometimes fear. And what of our loved ones who have passed: Where are they now? What has happened to them? And, what are they doing? What does the church have to say about these things?

### **The Resurrection Is Still Future.**

Let's begin at the end (so to speak). **The bodily resurrection is still in the future for everyone except Jesus** (1 Cor 15:22-23) *For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.*

**The resurrection hasn't happened yet.** Every living person and those who have died share this same expectancy, await the same future reunification, the same judgment, yet with varied outcomes.



## **The Ultimate Goal Of The Bodily Resurrection.**

Heaven doesn't denote the *ultimate goal* of the redeemed; Heaven isn't the Christian Hope. The main goal is to be bodily raised into the transformed, glorious likeness of Jesus Christ, and **reside with him forever**: new heavens and earth: fully participating in the Divine Life.

## **The Contemplation Of God (The Beatific Vision).**

St. Chrysostom, "*The most intense delight of the saints will be to see God.*" (Mt 5:8) This is known as *The Beatific Vision*. To possess a clear and perfect knowledge of God.

This communion of life and love with the Trinity, the angels and saints- is called "heaven." Heaven is the ultimate end and fulfillment of the deepest human longings, the state of supreme, definitive happiness. **We think spatially and scripture accommodates this limitation.**

**To live in heaven is to be with Christ**; the elect live in Christ, (Jn 14:3; 1 Thess 4:17). This provides insight into Paul's claim that we somehow have dual citizenship on earth *and at the same time* in heaven (Phil 3:20; Eph 2:9) **because we are "in Christ"** (Eph 1), we are raised and seated already participating in heaven (Eph 2:5-7).

Gregory Nazianzen, "*heaven is a perpetual festival, illuminated by the brightness, of the Godhead of which here we can only catch, obscure, fleeting glimpses, and it will be our joy to gaze upon the Trinity of divine persons; the understanding can scarcely grasp the magnitude of the blessings that await us, for we shall become sons of god and shall in fact be deified*" (1 Jn 3:2; 2 Pt 1:3-4).

## **The Death Of The Body.**

Death is the separation of the soul from the body. What happens to our bodies? Are bodies die, as the animating spirit has departed (more on the soul in a bit). We are laid in the earth awaiting the resurrection. We will be raised in the same self body but it will be supernatural, spiritualized: a spiritual body. (1 Cor 15:44) *It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a*

*spiritual body.* 2 Clement, we “*will rise again in our self same flesh we now possess.*” Jesus’ was raised in the same body evidenced by the holes in his hands and the wound in his side.

### **The Death Of The Body And The Death Of Sin.**

**What happens to us, our sinful selves, when we die?** Are we still not in need of some serious cleaning up? Do not our spirits, our souls, still leave a great deal to be desired? In our small steps of spiritual growth on earth do we still not have a mountain looming high above us? Yes we do. This is a natural instinct.

**We discount the significance of bodily death.** We’ve been fooled by a view of death and life in which the really important thing is the soul. (The drive to ‘win souls!’) But the Bible is far more concerned with our bodies. (1 Jn 2:16) *For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.*

Bodily death actually puts sin to an end. Yes, we presently have sin lingering around but bodily death finishes all that off in a single go!

**Key texts in Paul,** Rom 6:1-7 and Colossians 2:11-13, both speaking of baptism:

*(Romans 6:6-7) We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

**Cleansing from sin occurs in two stages:** First there is baptism and faith. Jesus says, “you are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you” (Jn 15:3). The word of the Gospel awakens faith in the hearth, the basic cleansing required.

*“The one who has washed”* said Jesus at the last supper, “*doesn’t need to wash again, except for his feet; he is clean all over*” (Jn13:10). The feet representing the part of us which still stands on the muddy ground of this world. This is where the ‘*sin which so easily gets in the way*’ (Heb 12:1) finds opportunities in this present life.

The good news is that although during this present life we struggle with sin, and may or may not make small progress towards genuine holiness, our remaining

propensity to sin is finished, cut off, done with all at once, in physical death: “the body is dead because of sin” declares Paul, “but the spirit is life because of righteousness” (Rom 8:10).

## **What About The Soul?**

### **The Soul is Not immortal.**

Irenaeus’s theological and anthropological convictions reflected the centrality which he assigned to resurrection. **He did not assume natural immortality.** On the contrary he denied it. To be “without beginning and without end ... belongs to God alone”.<sup>11</sup>

Immortality is a gift which, in the imagery of Paul “we may regard as a precious crown which we acquire by our own struggle, and which does not grow on us spontaneously”.<sup>12</sup>

God the creator will, in time, restore the dead to life.<sup>13</sup> This will be God’s gift offered through Christ Jesus.

### **The Soul is not Unconsciousness.**

‘Sleeping in Christ’ (1 Thess 4:14-17; 1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51). A term used frequently by St. Paul. He isn’t saying that Christians who have died are in a state of unconsciousness- then brought back to consciousness at the resurrection- but is employing a metaphor to remind us of our future ‘waking up’ which will be the bodily resurrection from the dead.

If death was an unconscious state, would Paul have preferred being with Christ over his present state? (Phil 1:21-23). See also the martyrs in Rev 6:6-9, consciously awaiting the final bliss of resurrected life.

### **The Soul is Not Annihilated at Death (cease to exist).**

(1 Peter 3:18) *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits*

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<sup>11</sup> Against Heresies, ii:34:2

<sup>12</sup> Against Heresies iv:37:7

<sup>13</sup> Against Heresies, v:3:2

*in prison, because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah.*

The Bible speaks of degrees of punishment in hell (Matt. 5:22; Rev. 20:12–14). But there can be no degrees of annihilation. Nonexistence is the same for all persons.

Annihilation would demean both the love of God and the nature of human beings as free moral creatures. Eternal suffering is eternal testimony to the freedom and dignity of humans, even unrepentant humans.

### **What About Purgatory?**

**There is no biblical grounds for a theology of punishment for sins after death.**

Romans 8:3. God didn't punish Jesus for sins, but God 'condemned sin in the flesh' of Jesus.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,** 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The idea that Christians need to suffer punishment for their sins in a post-mortem purgatory or anywhere else, fails to grasp the very heart of what was achieved on the cross.

(Rom 8:30) **“Who shall lay any charge against the elect?...”** Notice that Paul doesn't add, and after death, you'll have to go through some additional punishment in purgatory first! In fact, Paul makes it clear here and elsewhere that it is the present life that is meant to function as a purgatory, a time and place of putting sins to death.

“The suffering of this present time...’ (Rom 8:18-23), not some post-mortem state, is the valley we have to pass through in order to reach our glorious future!

## **There Is No Distinction In Death.**

If the ultimate destiny of Christians is bodily resurrection, which hasn't happened yet, then all Christians are in an intermediate state, between death and resurrection.

But are there distinctions to those in this intermediate state?

No. All are in the same condition; and all are saints.

Ephesians 1:1, in the NT every single saint is referred to as a Christian (even those muddled in sin).

Called saints not only because they are striving to live holy lives in the present, but through baptism and confessing Christ they have left the realm of darkness and entered into the kingdom of light (Col 1:12-14).

The NT language about bodily death of Christians and what happens to them makes no distinction whatsoever in this respect between those who have attained significant holiness and those who haven't. St. Paul "My desire is to depart and be with Christ" (Phil 1:22) **No where does he imply that he will be in a better or different state than the christans in Philippi. His state 'with Christ' will be exalted but in the same way as every other Christian shall be after death.**

Neither does Paul say that this 'departing and being with Christ' is the same thing as bodily resurrection; this is still in the future for him and all Christians who experience death.

## **Communio Sanctorum: The Communion of the Saints.**

Nicetas of Remesiana (335-414AD, Bishop Serbia) Earliest recorded use of the phrase "the communion of saints."

In Greek the phrase means "sharing in holy things" he was most likely referring to Eucharistic fellowship.

Main development in 5th century Latin church building on existing theology articulated by Polycarp in the 2nd century, denoted the belief that a place of special honor among Christians who had died was reserved for martyrs, and that Christians

within the church militant continued. to share fellowship with them, and gained spiritual benefit from doing so.<sup>14</sup>

The church on earth believed itself privileged to enjoy intimate fellowship with those who had gone ahead: (Augustine & Hilary of Potiers) the angels and saints, the apostles, prophets and patriarchs, surrounded the church on earth (they argued) and watched over it.

This understanding, or something like it, along with the idea of Eucharistic fellowship is what we affirm in saying ‘the Communion of the Saints’ towards the end of the Apostles Creed.<sup>15</sup>

### **Commemorating The Departed In The Liturgy Of Holy Communion.**

As the Holy Communion is the great Oblation or Sacrifice of the Christian Church to memorialize the Father of our Blessed Lord’s work, so it is offered with a purpose, which is, to memorialize Him on behalf of the souls whom our Lord’s work is saving. Thus it is the great means by which the Church *out of Heaven* participates in that propitiatory Sacrifice of Intercession which is being for ever offered *in Heaven* by our Lord and Saviour.

The habit of thought on this subject in the Primitive Church is very clearly illustrated by the words of St. Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century . In describing the rites of the Holy Eucharist to the newly-confirmed he speaks as follows: *“Then, after the spiritual Sacrifice is perfected, the bloodless Service upon that Sacrifice of propitiation, we entreat God for the common peace of the Church; for the tranquillity of the world; for kings; for soldiers and allies; for the sick; for the afflicted; and, in a word, for all who stand in need of succour we all supplicate and offer this Sacrifice. Then we commemorate also those who have fallen asleep before us; first, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, that at their prayers and intervention God would receive our petition. Afterward also on behalf of the holy Fathers and Bishops who have fallen asleep before us; and in a word, of all who in past years have fallen asleep among us, believing that it will be a very great advantage to the souls for whom the supplication is put up, while that holy and most awful Sacrifice is presented!”* [Catech. Lect. xxiii. 9, 10.]

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<sup>14</sup> NT Wright, *For All The Saints*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 16.

These words exactly represent the tone and custom of the Primitive Liturgies which all prayed for those who had fallen asleep in Christ.

### **Primitive Liturgical Examples:**

A most beautiful prayer is from the liturgy attributed to St. James, and was offered up day by day in the Church of Jerusalem, where St. Cyril was one of that holy Apostles' successors. It was said immediately after the Consecration.

Liturgy of St. James (Jerusalem). *“Remember also, O Lord, according to the multitude of Thy mercy and pities, me Thy humble and unworthy servant; and the Deacons that surround Thy holy Altar. Grant them blamelessness of life, preserve their ministry spotless, keep in safety their goings for good, that they may find mercy and grace with all Thy Saints that have been pleasing to Thee from one generation to another, since the beginning of the world, our ancestors, and fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Teachers, Holy Persons, and every just spirit made perfect in the faith of Thy Christ.... Remember, Lord, the God of the spirits and of all flesh, the Orthodox whom we have commemorated, from righteous Abel unto this day. Give them rest there, in the land of the living, in Thy kingdom, in the delight of paradise, in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, our holy fathers, whence pain, sorrow, and groaning is exiled, where the light of Thy countenance looks down, and always shines.”*

Liturgy of St. Mark. *“Give rest to the souls of our fathers and brethren that have heretofore slept in the faith of Christ, O Lord our God, remembering our ancestors, fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, bishops, holy and just persons, every spirit that has departed in the faith of Christ, and those whom to-day we keep in memory.”*

Liturgy of St. Clement. *“Let us commemorate the holy martyrs, that we may be deemed worthy to be partakers of their trial. Let us pray for all those who have fallen asleep in the Faith.”*

Liturgy of St. Chrysostom. *“Further, we pray for the blessed and ever-memorable founders of this holy abode, and for all our fathers and brethren that have fallen asleep before us, and lie here, and the orthodox that lie everywhere.” [From the Ectene.] “And, further, we offer to Thee this reasonable Service on behalf of those*

*who have departed in the Faith, our ancestors, fathers, ... and every just spirit made perfect in the Faith.” [From the Prayer of Oblation.] “And remember all those that are departed in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, and give them rest where the light of Thy countenance shines upon them.”*

**1928 American Prayer Book...** “And we also bless thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear; **beseeching thee to grant them continual growth in thy love and service**, and to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom.”

In commemorating the departed at the time of celebrating the Holy Eucharist, the Church today does as every known Church has done from the earliest age in which its Liturgical customs can be traced.

It would be a great deviation from Primitive Christianity to omit all mention of the deceased members of Christ, at the time when celebrating the great Sacrament of Love by which all the whole Church is bonded together.

### **All Departed Christians Are Substantially In The Same State.**

They all remain in restful happiness. This is not the final destiny for which they are bound, namely the bodily resurrection; it is a temporary resting place.

They with us are awaiting the completion of redemption. Until all of God’s people are safely home, none of them will experience the completeness of redemption. The Church militant and Church triumphant, those pilgrims on earth and those who “sleep” in peace, are one people unified in Christ: *they are the church expectant!*

Since they and we are both in Christ, we do indeed share with them in the Communion of Saints. There is no reason why we shouldn’t pray for them and with them: not to get out of purgatory but that they will be refreshed and filled with God’s joy and peace as they with us await the final fulfillment of our redemption (Heb 11:39-12:2).



## WEEK IV: THE BURIAL OF THE DEAD

### Death Comes For All.

Death has two histories, one the cosmic account of its origins in sin and its conquest by Christ's redemption. The second greatly affects the first story and without belief in a future resurrection of the body and eternal happiness, then Christian burial liturgies and practice are meaningless.

Dying is the process of sloughing off one's mortal coil, a process beginning at birth and accelerated in the final stages of illness or decrepitude.

Death is the extinction of life's flame, the departing of the soul from the body.

*Funerals* are the social and ceremonial observances performed to honor or accompany a body which is soon to be buried. Burial includes (or at least it used to) the religious service for burial and the final interment in the ground.

The final days, moments and hours are more often experienced privately, with a few very close family members- we could say these last moments (like most of spirituality) are becoming more privatized over time. Funerals (or celebrations of life) are for those invited and are private affairs because,

In part, christianity is fragmented, we don't live in a catholic community, where the majority of Christians belong to the same diocese though in different parishes, no common christian community exists;

In the same way, Christianity within a family is fragmented, parents attending one church, a son another, a daughter out of town yet another, etc.;

In part from shielding ourselves and others from the reality of death and dying;

Partly because we live more autonomously within the community and partly because we live life very close to the vest.

### 1600's Stuart England.

If you spend anytime reading historically about death and dying, you'll be amazed at the varied practices and beliefs of different peoples at different points of history.

Take 16th century England for example. A very Christian society and religious as well. I find it fascinating how death was experienced within the Christian

community in comparison to what we experience today. Listen to this selection from *Birth, Marriage, & Death in Stuart England*<sup>16</sup> (390).

### **17th Social Expectations.**

There existed a christian-societal expectation of deathbed intimacy and social performance. Listen to these excerpts taken from 17th century diary entries (read 392).

Parish bells tolled when a person was dying, signalling when someone was dead, and often rang again at the burial.

The church bells summoned attendants to the bedside or graveside, to bring comfort to the living and the dying, and assist the parting person by prompting neighbors to their prayers.<sup>17</sup>

Funeral processions were an extremely important journey for the departed to move from the place of death to the place of burial, from domestic to sacred space.

For accompanying family, neighbors, and friends it was an occasion for mourning and also for social display of respect.

The transportation of the dead was a civil affair, balancing the estate and circumstance of the deceased with the social and cultural concerns of the living.

### **Liturgical History (Brief).**

Historically, the Eucharst accompanied the burial of Christians. First, the Burial of the Dead, is From the 1662 Book of Common Prayer from which our prayer is derived, (Augustine 9.13) “So, when the body was carried forth, we both went and returned without tears. For neither in those prayers which we poured forth unto You when the sacrifice of our redemption was offered up unto You for her — the dead body being now placed by the side of the grave, as the custom there is, prior to its being laid therein — neither in their prayers did I shed tears; yet was I most grievously sad in secret all the day, and with a troubled mind entreated You, as I was able, to heal my sorrow, but You did not;”

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<sup>16</sup> Cresey, David, 390-391.

<sup>17</sup> Cressy, 421.

Medieval times saw a great deal of ceremonies gather around the burial ceremony, the eucharist was always central.

The Reformers made provisions to continue this primitive practice by placing at the end of the service an introit based on the Sunday Gospel at a burial, and the propers from the 1560 Latin Prayer Book's 'Celebration of the Holy Communion when there is a Burial of the Dead.'

Cranmer was doing a delicate dance... English services underwent several changes under Puritan influence who were adamantly against any service at the burial of the dead. "“They would have no minister,” says Cosin, “to bury their dead, but the corpse to be brought to the grave and there put in by the clerk, or some other honest neighbour, and so back again without any more ado.”

The 1552 prayer book eliminated the Requiem Communion, combined both the inside and graveside service into one, removed the psalms, and took pains to excise from the prayers every suggestion of intercession for the departed.

The best of the Puritans wished to restrict the ceremonies to exhortation and preaching only; they objected to psalms, and these were given up until 1661; and as they had a peculiar aversion to the celebration of the Lord's Supper on any but very rare occasions, so its celebration at funerals was very distasteful to them, and was ignorantly associated by them with the Roman doctrine of purgatory.

Thus this practice was also much discouraged. When the Psalms were again printed in the Office, after a hundred years' suppression, the Gospel and Epistle were not; and the funeral Communion had almost passed out of memory in the first half of this century.

Note that the 1928 Office For the Burial of the Dead (p. 324) is, much like the 1662 English Prayer Book. The service to be said in the church is in structure similar to the Daily Offices of Morning and Evening Prayer. HOWEVER, (turn to page 268)... Propers for "At the Burial of the Dead."

The 2019 ACNA Prayer Book has restored an Holy Communion Service For the Burial of the Dead.

## **Why Should Holy Communion Accompany The Burial Of The Dead?**

**The Holy Eucharist is essentially a sacrificial act offered up for the departed as well as for the living.** The petition in the Prayer of Oblation, “humbly beseeching Thee to grant that by the merits and death of Thy Son Jesus Christ and through faith in His Blood, we and all Thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins and all other benefits of His Passion,” is one which includes the departed members of Christ’s whole Church, or it would be only a petition for a portion of the Church; and “all other benefits of His Passion” seems especially to apply to the departed, as “remission of our sins” applies to the living. “So that the virtue of this Sacrifice (which is here in this prayer of oblation commemorated and represented) doth not only extend itself to the living and those that are present, but likewise to them that are absent, and them that be already departed, or shall in time to come live and die in the faith of Christ.” At no time could this benefit be so appropriately sought, as when for the last occasion the body of the deceased Christian lies in front of the Altar.

**A funeral Eucharist is also an act of communion with the departed, by which we make an open recognition of our belief that he/she still continues to be one of God’s dear children;** that the soul in Paradise and the body in the grave are still the soul and body of one who is still a member of Christ, still a branch (as much as those who remain alive) of the true Vine.

**The Holy Communion being the special means by which the members of Christ are brought near to their Divine Head, it is to it that the surviving friends of the deceased may look for their chief comfort in bereavement.** By it they may look to have their faith strengthened in Him Who has proclaimed Himself to be “The Resurrection and the Life:” and by the strengthening of their faith they may hope to see, even in the Burial of their loved ones, the promise of a better resurrection when that which has borne the image of the earthly shall also bear the image of the Heavenly, when death shall be swallowed up in victory, and when God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes in the joy of a reunion before His Presence.

### **The 1928 Burial Office (BCP, 324).**

First note that a Christian Funeral is a worship service of the church, to occur within the people of God and is common to all Christians.

“The minister meets the body” and leads it into the church (the first procession). The body goes in “feet first.” *The body is attending its final worship service on earth.*

“I am the resurrection and the life...” This is the processional song or is said by the priest and is the finest summation of NT teaching about our future resurrection and eternal life which is grounded upon faith in our Lord.

Next is the recitation of the Psalms which were omitted from the 1552 Book of Common Prayer but restored in their entirety in the 1662 as we find in the 1928.

Psalm 39; 90; 27; 46; 121; 130. These incorporate the whole congregation spoken not only for the departed but for personal comfort as well.

### **The Lessons.**

1 Cor xv. 20. The classic statement on the bodily resurrection as a consequence of our Lord’s own resurrection. Hope of being raised.

Romans viii. 14. Promise of sonship and the eternal bliss of the heavenly inheritance. Also, we are more than conquerors and nothing will separate us from the love of God!

John xiv. I. If Jesus goes he will return to bring us to where he now is.

### **The Collect.**

Read... Note the idea of progression: “increase in knowledge and love of God; go from strength to strength *in the life of perfect service.*”

### **The Blessing (Num 6:24-26).**

## **At The Grave (The 2nd procession).**

### **The Anthem.**

These antiphons are the ‘song of the mourners’ and also ‘songs of hope.’

### **The Committal.**

A final summation of theology of death and the hope of the resurrection.

Note this is said while the dirt is cast upon the body. We commit the body *into the earth, back to the dust.*

**The Anthem.**

Another encouragement to the living.

**Kyrie and Lord's Prayer.**

The Lord's Prayer makes this an act of communal and public worship.

**The Prayers.**

“Accept OUR prayers on behalf of the soul of thy servant...”

“Thanks for the good examples... And we beseech thee, that we, with all those who are departed... [prayers for the departed - to be resurrected, perfected and attain the Beatific Vision]

3re prayer omits the departed and focuses on the living.

**The Blessing (Heb 13:20-21).****Meditation: Two Funeral Processions (Luke 7:11-17).**

## RESOURCES

### ARTICLES

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2018/05/evangelical-gnosticism>

<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2018/11/we-shall-meet>

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2020/06/the-final-enemy>

<https://www.firstthings.com/article/2003/11/tolkien-and-the-gift-of-mortality>

<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2020/03/deaths-delayed>

### ART

<https://medium.com/mutualart/famous-paintings-that-reflect-our-mortality-back-at-us-7f69219ad6fa>

### POETRY

<https://classicalpoets.org/2016/09/29/10-greatest-poems-about-death-a-grim-reader>

### BOOKS

*Birth, Marriage, & Death in Elizabethan England*, Cressy

*For all the Saints*, NT Wright

*The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Book V, Richard Hooker

*On the Soul and the Resurrection*, St. Gregory of Nyssa

*Confessions*, St. Augustine

*This Secular Age*, William Taylor

1549. 1662. 1928 Books of Common Prayer