

EASTER 6 All Souls' **OUR HEAVENLY HOME** dtw

Acts 16.15 When Lydia and her household were baptised, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home" And she prevailed upon us.

John 14.23 Jesus answered, "Those who love me will keep my words; and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them".

"Come and stay at my home...make your home with us". Such poignant, idyllic words, don't you think? When you love someone very much, you want that person to stay with you forever. That is how Jesus feels about you and wants you to feel about him. He wants to make his home with you. He is the Tree of Life. In the very next chapter of John he says "I am the true Vine...abide in me and I in you"...take a deep breath for a moment; be still, and abide in Christ. (Pause)

I'm sure that this church is both 'Spiritual Home' and 'Mother' for many of you. In a short space of time All Souls' has become very much a Spiritual Home for me. I like abiding here with you. But this is just a staging post for all of us on this earthly pilgrimage. Heaven is our true home. And the good news is that heaven is ours already in the gift of eternal life. One day, one moment, when we take our final breath, we will simply slip through to our Keeper and Maker, Redeemer and Saviour and behold Divine Love, face to face; pure, abiding Love.

Meanwhile, as Jesus prepared his disciples while he was still with them, it is a good thing to be prepared for our eternal home and I want to spend the rest of this time talking to you about this. What I am about to share with you has also been prompted by some of our members.

I have presided over countless funerals of people for whom their parish church has been their spiritual home. The way we go about them here *affirms* them as spiritual homes so very much for the bereaved family and their friends. It is also such a powerful witness to the faith and life of the Church and what it has meant in the believer's life journey. Every now and then, however, I am called to do a funeral of a believer where this is not the case. One such example was when I was on the staff of St George's Cathedral, Perth. A woman had died who was single, an extremely committed Christian, for whom St George's was not only her spiritual home, but her family too. The Holy Eucharist was her life-blood. When she died, the first I knew of it was through a 'phone call from the funeral director. His instruction was that her next of kin, a nephew and businessman from the eastern states, on a tight schedule, was flying to Perth for a quick private cremation and would I conduct it?

That wasn't a problem. What was a great concern was the fact that her church family was cut off from this experience – indeed, the service would not even take place in her spiritual home. Certainly, we still had a memorial service for her a few days later, but it was not the same. All this could have been avoided if her

clear wishes had been put down on paper; including what I am positive would have been a desire for a Requiem Eucharist and joyful hymns of resurrection. In contrast we, a handful of people, gathered in a small, sterile, crematorium chapel.

I therefore want to encourage you today to consider making the time to write down your wishes in this regard. That may sound a bit 'on the nose' for some, especially if you reckon you've got a lot of living to do! In reality, it is never too early to get our plans in order and that of course includes a Will; but keep these plans separate because most Wills are not read until after the funeral. However, my real point is this: it needs to be remembered that those given the responsibility of making arrangements may not be practicing worshippers themselves, so if you feel a church funeral is important, beat them to it!

Planning for your funeral makes a lot of sense and we can keep your plan safe and confidential in a special file to which future incumbents can be alerted. This can make things so much easier for your family, clergy and funeral director when the time comes. Even after a long period of illness, one can never really be prepared for the death of a loved one. There is no 'right' time to die, in the sense that it will always be accompanied by feelings of shock, bewilderment, emptiness...I often encounter bereaved spouses or relatives who are too numb to have to sit down and plan a funeral, or think about what their loved one would have liked to be done or said. To have your plans written down beforehand with copies in the possession of next of kin, clergy and funeral director can considerably relieve this burden. You can also arrange a plan with a funeral company beforehand.

I have lifted an Appendix from my book *After the Wedding* which deals with this very thing. It is entitled *You and your funeral*. You will find it on the back table. A good number of people at Burnside and Parkside used it while I was there and found it a helpful guide. Feel free to take one or two home and if you would like to make a time to go through it or bring a completed form to me to be copied or scanned and saved, and kept confidentially, just give me a call.

Finally, a couple of recommendations about funerals held here in church.

- If there is to be a cremation, the entire service can happen here. No one, except the funeral directors, needs to go to the crematorium. The words of committal can be said here and the family simply makes their farewell by the roadside.
- This can be immediately followed by refreshments here or elsewhere
- Not only is this way of doing things so helpful to the bereaved and their friends; it also places the emphasis in the right place. In many cases, a few weeks later the ashes can be laid to rest in our own Garden or a place of your choosing, with a short Interment Service. Thus, the whole rite from beginning to end can occur here at the spiritual home. It won't appeal to everyone, but it is worth knowing about.