

## ***Grief***

All of us are familiar with the experience of loss. We can lose a plant that we have nurtured: we can lose a job that we have enjoyed, or we can lose a dream that has meant a lot to us. As we grow older we find that we lose agility and mobility, there is memory loss, and perhaps the loss of the family home. It seems that to be human is to experience loss. With loss comes grief.

## ***Loved ones***

There is nothing quite like the loss of a loved one. Even if the loved one has been unwell, there is still a sense of shock at their passing. Our life is disoriented and our world shrinks. We find that we are de-stabilized and that nothing will quite be the same again. We may be bewildered and confused. Simply dealing with the shock of the news can absorb a lot of energy and leave us tired and exhausted. Tears are a sign of our loss. We may not be able to relax or sleep easily.

## ***Regrets***

In bereavement there can be regrets that are not easy to cope with. We may think that we should have visited more often. There may be words of appreciation or affection that remain unexpressed. Perhaps there were unresolved issues that could have been worked through, but the opportunity was not taken. Life is not always tidy, and we find that we often have to live with regrets.

## ***Support***

In times of grief there will be offers of support from close friends and others who are sympathetic. It is a time for welcoming these offers, and receiving the kindness that friends will want to share. Some may write letters recalling the loved one who has passed away: others may offer spiritual support and pray, while others may provide help such as preparing a meal or baking for guests who will arrive. All of us feel vulnerable at times, and it is in this time of loss that we can be at our weakest. Receiving gifts can be a blessing.

## ***Memory***

Loss stimulates memory. When we grieve we find ourselves recalling events and incidents that remind us of the one who has died. As family and friends gather, the telling of cherished stories, sometimes humorous, can relieve tension and express gratitude.

## ***Faith***

Christian faith offers hope in the midst of distress, and the conviction that God's love holds us all especially in times of shock and pain. There is consolation in many passages of scripture. We may cry out to God in prayer, with questions and in anger. Our faith teaches that God understands the darkness that we go through in grief. It is possible to understand death as our journey toward God's light. We have faith that as God raised Jesus, we too may live in the hope of resurrection life. This hope is the gift of God's grace.

## ***Funeral***

The service of worship provides the opportunity for family and friends to gather. If the one who has died was a baptized Christian, then it is right that the funeral be held in the local church. The service enables those present to hear again the promise of resurrection life. It is a time for tributes which discern the way the grace of God was at work in this life, now honoured. Grief is set in the context of faith, sometimes fearful and fragile, that 'in life and death, in life beyond death, we are not alone. God is with us.' The intention in the funeral is to give thanks for the one who has died, to celebrate the God who holds each one of us and to pray that God will welcome into the communion of saints the one for whom our hearts grieve.

## ***Ministry***

The minister and members of the community of faith will offer pastoral support to those who mourn. In the preparation of the funeral liturgy, the minister can provide guidance and resources that will assist the family. It may be that the one who has died may have left some notes about prayers, readings and hymns that will help in the preparation of the service. Coming soon after the death, the funeral is a step along the way for the bereaved in their journey toward acceptance of the loss. It is important that encouragement be given for the bereaved to ask questions, articulate sorrow and display hurt. For health, we need to express the deep feelings provoked by the loss.

## ***Affirmation***

Life is a gift from God.

It begins in mystery at birth;  
It is sustained in mystery through life;  
It ends in mystery at death.

The church proclaims good news  
That we need not be afraid  
Of the mystery;

For the nature of the mystery  
Is disclosed in Jesus  
As self-offering love.

In Jesus we have a window  
Into the action  
And very being of God.

In him we see God's love for us.  
In him we see God's invitation to life.  
In him we see God's gracious purpose.

We were created in love,  
By love, and for love  
And we believe that this love

Will one day embrace us.

*Terry Wall.*

## ***Our hope***

“We shall rest and we shall see:  
We shall see and we shall love;  
We shall love and we shall praise  
In the end, which is no end.”

St. Augustine.

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Te Hahi Weteriana o Aotearoa

# ***The Christian Funeral***



“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” Matthew 5:4