

The Net
St. Andrew's Episcopal Church
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Church Office: (972) 262-1788

Web Site: www.standrews-gp.org

From the Rector:

Everyone dies. This is an inescapable part of the human condition. Everyone dies. But you wouldn't know that by looking at our culture. First off, consider your reaction to what I have already said: everyone dies. The statement is simple enough: two words; a subject and a verb agreeing. But many find it to be bothersome, even rude, to mention this simple statement. You may have heard that it is impolite to talk about religion and politics in well-mannered society. If this is true then talking about death will get you thrown out on your ear. It isn't that our culture finds stating the obvious tiresome. Instead, mentioning death tends to shine an unwanted light upon the frantic business of our crowded lives, raising questions about our priorities and fundamental commitments.

But our culture prefers to keep death under wraps. Yes, there is the obvious youth cult demanding that everyone must look and feel young and beautiful. The media does its best to keep fresh faced socialites, and their lifestyles, in front of us at every turn. But more disturbingly, our culture keeps death under wraps by peddling abortion as birth-control, omitting coverage of military and foreign deaths in our foreign wars, and locating the final memorial acts in inconspicuous "funeral homes".

The Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann wrote that, "The American "funeral home" is indeed the very symbol of secularist religion, for it expresses both the quiet acceptance of death as something natural (a house among other houses with nothing typical about it) and the denial of death's *presence* in life." Secularist religion is the world view that the material world is the only one that we know, and should care about. Everyone dies, but not everyone truly lives. So the devout secularist goes about this world living with gusto, either with consuming abandon or sacrificial charity. The similarity being the conviction that there is nothing other than what can be seen, touched and tasted. Secularism or materialism tries to make sense out of death by focusing our attention on life.

But if we reject secular materialism, modern religious sensibilities are misleading as well. So often we hear that our religion helps get us through the process of death by explaining it away as a natural part of life. This thinking is not confined to Hindus, Buddhists or "new-agers". Certainly their practitioners think of this current physical existence as one that finally gives over to a greater, mystical and undifferentiated "spiritual" existence. But the modern, western Christian has drunk deeply from this as well. So often we hear that Christianity helps take away the fear of death because there is some other existence waiting on the other side. Some find comfort in the idea that in death the soul is released from the body to "go to heaven to be with Jesus". Inevitably we are presented with the idea that good people are fitted with wings and harps so that they may spend eternity resting upon clouds! Yes, these are certainly stereotypes, and ridiculous ones at that, but they run rampant in many Christian assemblies today!

But the Church in its commitment to the Scriptures cannot ally itself with either of these world views, either ignoring or capitulation to death. Instead, the Church proclaims life. Schmemmann writes,

Christianity is not reconciliation with death. It is the revelation of death, and it reveals death because it is the revelation of Life. Christ is this Life. And only if Christ is Life is death what Christianity proclaims it to be, namely the enemy to be destroyed,

.and not a “mystery” to be explained. Religion and secularism, by explaining death, give it a “status” a rationale, make it “normal”. Only Christianity proclaims it to be abnormal and therefore, truly horrible. At the grave of Lazarus Christ wept, and when his own hour to die approached, “he began to be sore amazed and very-heavy” ... It is, in other words, when Christ reveals Life to us that we can hear the Christian message about death as the enemy of God. It is when Life weeps at the grave of the friend, when it contemplates the horror of death, that the victory over death begins.

This article began as I sat in Shuman Chapel meditating upon the Psalm appointed for the day earlier this week. David writes in Psalm 39.5, “Lord, let me know mine end, and the number of my days; that I may be certified how long I have to live.” And he concludes his thought saying, “And now, Lord, what is my hope? Truly my hope is even in thee.” You may recognize this as the first of the processional psalms in the burial office in the Prayer Book. Note how David does not conclude his desperate cry by consoling himself with temporal, material success or resigning himself to another, spiritual existence. Instead, his consolation comes from God alone: truly my hope is in thee.

The Christian proclaims one thing: Christ has beaten death by his own death. He has trodden upon the head of that great serpent Satan. He has ripped the gates off Hell. He has released the prisoner, and the captive he has set free! Christianity must grasp the nettle of human pain, suffering and death, but not to dismiss nor glorify it. Instead we say that Christ has taken the worst that death had to offer and has been victorious. We defy death as the enemy and the culture of death as the opponent of Jesus the Lord of Life. Alleluia, Christ is risen! The Lord is risen indeed, Alleluia!

Yours in Christ,
Fr. Morse

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If you’ve not checked the church web site lately, please do so. This is an on-going, ever -changing site which is kept current by Dave McFeely.

[Www.standrews-gp.org](http://www.standrews-gp.org)

Contact pfuller@tx.rr.com to receive your calendars and bulletins via e-mail.

Soon you will receive your invitation to the induction of Clyde and Verna Bargsley into the Court of St. Andrew. As always, you may expect a jolly good roast!

Remember to keep the Vestry in your prayers as they continue the search process for a new rector for our Parish.



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