

**Sermon preached by Sir Tom Lees in 2011**  
**Read at his own funeral in Lytchett Minster Parish Church 5<sup>th</sup> March 2016**

A word from Tom

I've been to several funerals lately. It seems that many people are quite scared of death, its finality, its sense of cutting off, of suddenly there's nothing. You are alone with no one to be beside you. I remember vividly my own father's death, of feeling very alone, of the thought "You are the next generation now with no one to help you." And of not knowing what to do, of thinking 'Oh Daddy, I wish you hadn't gone so suddenly without any warning, I've got so many questions I need to know the answer to.' And the thought, 'You are the one who has to be responsible now, not anybody else'.

I have tried to make it easier for my family, I don't know whether I have because part of the pain of death for survivors is the actual missing the one gone, missing the cuddles and the kisses and the smiles, the living relationship. I have tried to make easy the practical problems of the moment, even if I can't do much about the going. There is a copy of my Will in my personal file, I have a small life insurance policy which is there too and, if my death is a result of an accident, the policy will pay out more. I used to tell Christopher that if I died when he was around he should pop me out of the window (Christine is too small to do that!) so as to be able to claim my death was an accident. But now I live in a bungalow I don't think the insurance would believe it!

When I die (not 'if' – the fact is certain, the only ifs are when and how?) I would like my funeral to be as simple as possible. A Church funeral and thanksgiving service for me to join in to give thanks for my lovely life, and I have had a lovely life. Oh yes, there have been sorrows and sufferings, but in all events, God has been present with me. A cremation would be OK then my ashes can lie at Holton Lee beside the ashes of Faith. A simple stone of slate to match hers. Room enough beside me for Christine when her time comes in her turn to die, if that is what she wants, to be buried beside me.

When I die, one of two things will happen to me. Either there's nothing else, as atheists aver, and that will be the end of life for me, here on earth or anywhere else, and there's nothing more to be said or done. Therefore there is nothing to be afraid of, sooner or later it happens to everyone who lives and that's that. I may have regrets – about things I have done or said which I ought not to have done, or things I have left undone. But it will be too late now.

Or else (and this is my firm belief) my spirit separates from the shell of my body. (I don't know how.) My life here on earth is fulfilled and my spirit becomes one in love

with God in Christ Jesus in eternity. I don't exactly know or understand how that will be either, or what it will look like, but I look forward to it with great excitement and joy. However it happens, the future is to be embraced and welcomed, just as all my life Jesus has welcomed and loved and embraced me and kept me. And that I know to be true and to be my experience.

In one sense, whenever I die it will be an awkward time for those whom I leave and whom I love and who love me. But we all have to die, each in our turn. And if it happens to everyone, it must not be a moment to be feared when it approaches. So I ask everyone not to sorrow for me but rather to be thankful to God with me. I believe in God, in His Son Jesus Christ and in His Holy Spirit. I have had too much experience of Him in and during my life for me not to believe and trust in Him.

I am not afraid to die – but I do have a slight concern about how I shall die. I am torn between wishing for a quick death, which will shock people and leave some hanging on to me and unprepared for my going, and a long, slow one which seems drawn out so that those I love begin to say, 'I wish he would go'. I should like some time to help others to prepare for my departing whenever it may come, that people may know that I do not fear what St Francis called 'Brother Death' but am ready to welcome him when he comes.

In the back of my Bible I have written a poem I once stumbled upon. I don't know who the author is.

*I used to think,  
Loving life so greatly,  
That dying would be like leaving a party before the end.*

*Now I know that the party is really happening somewhere else  
And that the music and the laughter  
Escaping in snatches  
To make the heart beat harder  
And the pulse to quicken  
Come from a place  
Not far away.*