

When You Are Alone, Christ Is with You

Nothing lasts forever. You and I know that rationally, but emotionally we would rather not face it. And we aren't the first generation to avoid this truth: early Spanish explorers came to America (Florida) looking for the fabled fountain of youth. In our own country, we've commercialised their search and made it into a science. Health clubs, diet systems, and exercise programs are lucrative ventures for entrepreneurs to cash in on society's perpetual quest for beautiful bodies and youthful vigour.

Don't get me wrong, health and fitness are important. But many of us are in denial. Though we know we're not immortal, we prefer to live as if we are. The thought of giving up familiar daily work in retirement is bad enough, but dying?

Human life is fragile. We're all just one short breath and a few feeble heartbeats away from death at any given moment. Some of us put our lives at risk routinely, but thankfully, most of us don't often have a reason to think seriously about dying.

But that can change in an instant. Sometimes, the spectre of death breaks in on us suddenly and intensely - a tragic accident, perhaps. A violent crime. A dire illness. Any number of calamities can suddenly bring us face-to-face with mortality. In one horrific moment, our resilience dissipates. We find it impossible to remain serene and calm when facing death - our own or that of those we love.

Nothing lasts forever. If we want stability, we'll need to find an anchor outside this turbulent world.

The prophet Isaiah writes, "*The word of our God will stand forever*" (40:8). Because God Himself is eternal, His Word lasts to all eternity. Nothing else endures.

Check your mirror: have you noticed a stray grey hair appearing unexpectedly or unwelcome wrinkles? We seem surprised that we grow older, as though somehow we can avoid the passage of time.

We should know better, of course. Most adults notice how children seem to grow by inches every passing month and how suddenly babies turn into toddlers. But for some reason, we think that when we at last arrive at the prime of life, we're going to stay there permanently. In this decaying world, nobody gets a pass on death.

It's not only the frail elderly who die. I've buried little children as well as young adults in the prime of life. No doubt death has touched you, too; you likely already know intimately the pain of loss and the gruelling ache of grief.

Here's the unvarnished truth: death is here to stay until Jesus returns to claim His bride, the church. On that final day, He will raise all the saints in the power of His resurrection, out of the dust of death into risen eternal glory. But Jesus has not abandoned us until then. We aren't just biding our time, running out the clock in this dying world. We have an anchor in eternity. Jesus promises to be with us every step of the way, even in calamity and the darkest valleys of our lives. He ties His eternal presence to His living and abiding Word.

Jesus told Peter, "*The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life*" (John 6:63). When tragedy interrupts our lives or adversity strikes, we need to listen to Jesus. He links His life-giving Spirit to the words He speaks.

Peter was listening carefully. So when Jesus asked his disciples if they were going to leave - like many others who rejected His teaching - Peter spoke for them all. "*Lord, to whom shall we go?*" he said. "*You have the words of eternal life*" (John 6:68).

Perhaps in your own personal world, facing decline and loss, you've begun to wonder if Jesus has abandoned you to muddle through as best you can. When everything seems stacked against you, people often begin to think that God is against them, too. Whether you've faced long days of ongoing distress or one short hour of deep darkness, you may sense you've been abandoned by both God and everyone you know. Don't believe it for a minute. Christ Jesus has promised to be with you in His abiding Word of grace and hope.

All this calls for faith, of course. But in the deepest valleys and most anxious moments of life, faith is frequently in short supply. Where will you find the faith you need to survive and thrive? The same place you find Jesus: in His Word. "*Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ*" (Romans 10:17).

See how that works? Instead of retreating into your head to cope with misery, you need to get out of yourself. In stressful times fears and doubts cycle endlessly through our minds in a continuous loop of anxiety and distress. Break that ugly cycle. Find a quiet place where you can talk out loud. Open up your Bible, and read aloud the words of Jesus. His words are Spirit and life.

Those very words of Jesus will give you the faith you need to speak aloud your prayers and praises, petitions and thanksgivings. Don't hold anything back. In His calming presence, you can pour out the contents of your anguished heart in confident prayer.

There's only one place to be when calamity strikes or the darkness of this decaying world engulfs you in its fearful grip. Isolation is your enemy - there's no way to tackle personal distress or public tragedy alone. But you don't need to. Go to Jesus; He has the words of eternal life. And those words are life for you.