

# A Grief Experienced – Terry Alve 3 September 2017

Reference point: Romans 12:15 **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”**

I have been a lot of weeping, actually and figuratively, during the past 10 days, following my bachelor brother Gordon’s death on Thursday 24 Aug. Gordon died at home alone, less than three days after some of us shared a birthday tea with him at Breakers’ in PN as he celebrated his 61<sup>st</sup> birthday. There we rejoiced with him over a few beers and food before weeping over his death and funeral.

Firstly, can I thank those of you who have sent messages and especially Dave & Ken who actually came up to PN for Gordon’s funeral. It was such a surprise. Especially to see Ken Woodhouse who was there so soon after his mother’s funeral here. Particularly noticed Ken’s tears as we talked after the service as he, wept with me who was weeping!

What have I noticed over these few days that might speak to us of God with us? I have distilled my observations in to 7 points that I would like to share with you today.

- **We do not know when we will die, nor when our I loved ones will.**  
NB. Marty Bodmin’s death and funeral recently, the night his wife Jill returned from visiting her daughter in France; and while was wakeful in the lounge after trip while Marty was asleep in bed when he died.  
C.F. Gordon sent home from work Wed afternoon with encouragement to visit his doctor before he was found Friday afternoon after his workmates were unable to contact him.
- **Keep contact and celebrate special occasions regularly.**  
It is very easy to put off doing something that we might later regret, like celebrating a birthday.
- **Notice the serendipity that God offers speaking to us of an opportunity.**  
I very nearly did not go to PN for Gordon’s birthday. Margaret and I were staying with her cousins just north of Masterton on the Sunday and Monday nights. It had been planned that we would have a reunion with several of her cousins on the Monday night. I had decided I needed to be at this gathering to support Margaret and meet some of the family I had never met. This would have meant NOT going to Gordon’s birthday tea. At the last moment the family gathering was rescheduled for Sunday night. The way opened up for me to go to PN and leave Margaret with her host cousins.
- **Sometimes we need to be there to represent others, and to make it happen.**  
Usually my younger sister and her husband from PN are always at Gordon’s birthday tea. They are very close, however they were in Hastings for Clive’s sister’s funeral which was held the next day – btw Gordon travelled up there for that. The tea may

not have happened or at least been planned for later if I had not said I will be there. It would have been too late, given Christine and Clive did not get back until Wed. evening.

- **Share the love.**

Mum died 2 years ago and we had her funeral in the PN funeral directors' chapel. We were inclined to go there for Gordon's funeral. However, it became apparent that the funeral would be large and that Gordon's colleagues from the city council convention centre and arena were in as much shock as we were following his sudden death. More than that, when we approached them, they clearly indicated that they would love to host the funeral at the Elwood Room at the Convention Centre and use their catering staff for refreshments. In the event the large number attending would not have been as well accommodated at the FD's and it helpfully gave grieving staff an opportunity to express their love for Gordon.

- **Naturally a funeral gathering provides a great opportunity to catch up.**

Yet again, several of the wider family/whanau were there in support. Beyond them many people from away back turned up; and several others have sense condolences. Funerals, like weddings, are key times to build and develop family bonds. Perhaps even to address family conflicts – 1960 reconciliation between mum and grandma as they went to the funeral of my 6 year old cousin Peter who was hole in the heart (blue) baby. Somehow their grief over Peter's very premature death helped them to see what matters in a fresh light. In the event Mum offered the primary care for Grandma in her latter years as the love was restored.

- **Our senses are heightened when we grieve – be easy on yourself.**

Family member tensions – we are all different

FD and Clergy/Celebrant sensitivity important – viewing & graveside plot

**Journaling helps to capture awareness that otherwise might be fleeting and lost.**

Reflecting and writing it down helps consolidate the blessings and notice things that might be missed without thoughtful remembrance and reflection. Not only when we face the death of a loved one, but all manner of other occasions.

Interestingly, I did some work with one of my spiritual directees yesterday and among other things we talked about how dialogue about our dreams can assist us notice what God might be inviting us to process. As you know dreams can be very fleeting, if we notice them at all. Making a note or two on our bedside pad can help us to remember them and to work with them in a healing and helpful way.

Having been close to 100's of deaths during my lifetime and ministry, both personally and as a minister, I would assert that there is life in death in all manner of ways. Let's embrace death holistically and see it as the gift it is; and let us not fear but allow the thought of our own mortality encourage us to believe that death can and will be a place of profound blessing.