



# Life is a fatal disease

‘Life is a fatal disease’ was a phrase frequently used by one of my favourite consultants. He was right. We are born, we die, and in between we experience the perversity of British weather (or the luxury of no such experience if you are an overseas *Triple Helix* reader). Apart from undertakers, mortuary workers and butchers, the medical and nursing professions probably come across death on a daily basis more than any other.

Most people fear death. Woody Allen, comedian extraordinaire, remarked that, ‘It’s not that I mind dying, I just don’t want to be there when it happens’. Some Americans have had their bodies preserved through cryotherapy in the hope that when a cure is found for their cause of death, they can be brought back to life. The fact that some could only afford preserving their heads smacks of sheer absurdity!

If we were to stop and view the mounting death toll in the world today, from the scourge of AIDS, to the revenge killings in Israel and Palestine, and even amongst the patients entrusted into our care, we could be forgiven for feeling overwhelmed. Death demands an explanation as an impostor on the world stage. As Paul acknowledged, ‘If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men’ (1 Corinthians 15:19).

When Jesus was faced with Lazarus’ death he ‘wept’ (John 11:35). We see a troubled Jesus, a deeply moved Jesus. To quote John Stott,<sup>1</sup> ‘Death was a foreign body. Jesus resisted it; he could not come to terms with it.’ Yet out of the whole crowd gathered around the tomb that day, Jesus was the only one who knew what would happen next! ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who

believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die’, he proclaimed, and then proved it was true by raising Lazarus!

As believers now, we know that Jesus has the power to raise us too. Death is no longer the end of life but a brief interlude on a journey. I could but smile when my seven-year-old friend (with grade 4 neuroblastoma at presentation) said to me, ‘It’s like calling in at McDonald’s when on the motorway’.

Death is inevitable. It’s not a failure of modern medicine but a consequence of living in a fallen world. The gift of eternal life is also, alas, optional. I say ‘alas’ because ‘small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it’ (Matthew 7:13,14). Many are rather on that ‘broad road that leads to destruction’. I’m grateful for the person who led me to Christ, for my relationship with Jesus, and the certain hope of eternal life. As a result I can look forward to death, as a checkpoint along the way, with the best still to come. As Christian doctors we are in a privileged position to share the phenomenal truth of Jesus’ victory over sin and even death itself with our patients, and their relatives and friends. Can others that we meet today have the opportunity of hearing the same Good News so that they might join us on the journey ... and mine’s a Big Mac and fries when we get there (and in heaven, calorie free of course!)

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1. Stott J. *The Cross of Christ*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press. 1987:65