

Easter Day 2011

**Sermon preached by The Very Revd Robert MacCarthy
in Saint Patrick's Cathedral**

There is a reading popular at funerals and memorial services ascribed to Henry Scott Holland, once a canon of St Paul's, which proclaims that 'death is nothing at all I have only slipped away into the next room'. That is clearly nonsense and is moreover a misquotation of Scott Holland.

Christians sometimes think that death doesn't really exist; that human beings just keep going in another realm and in another way. But for all its popular appeal this isn't a Christian position at all.

Death will come to all of us – it is a going into the dark, the end of all we know. But what Easter proclaims is a God who has made me a unique person who is precious to him and who will not let me go – that I am called into a relationship with God which will extend beyond my death.

St Paul, who wrote before any of the gospel writers, says "all I know is Christ and the power of his risen life". The first Christians experience of Resurrection, the knowledge that Jesus Christ was in their midst and a life-giving spirit created the church – there would be no christianity, no St Patrick's Cathedral without that. God in Christ makes us re-think who we are and what our ultimate end is to be. For as St Paul puts it "if anyone is united to Christ, there is a new creation". This new creation is a life-changing as the original creation of the world. And this new kind of life is called "eternal". It begins here and now and is measured not by time, but by who we are, not by what we do.

And so it's futile to speculate about life after death or the unimaginable life of heaven: it's also unnecessary. For being a Christian isn't about earning our place in heaven or avoiding that ultimate loneliness that is hell. It's about responding to the Christ-like God revealed by Jesus, and so discovering the God in whose likeness we are made and whose life is within us all. And it's about entering into a relationship of love and trust of such a quality that nothing has the power to destroy it. That alone rings true, as we reflect on the meaning and mystery of our life and death, rings true to the promises of Jesus; rings true to everything we know about the nature of life and rings true to our own experience of living and being loved. In Jesus, God does just that.