

## 21. Life's not as solid as I thought.

### **Psalm 103:8-18**

As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more. But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD'S love is with those who fear him, and his righteousness with their children's children – with those who keep his covenant and remember to obey his precepts.

I received a letter from a good friend in March 2005. He is an Indonesian doctor, and had just spent two stints serving in Banda Aceh in the wake of the Asian Tsunami.

He sent me photos he had taken of flattened houses, like the pictures we all saw on T.V. His letter read (in his English): "I realised that humans are only dust. No matter what we are or what we have, all can be wiped out within second. I trembled".

These words from Psalm 103 will be read at my funeral as my body is buried or burned. It will most likely be read at yours too. It's worth reflecting on them before we reach that point and it's too late to benefit from them.

Life is not as solid as we tend to think it is. Certainly, the shootings will have brought many younger West Cumbrians face to face with the inevitability of death for perhaps the first time. The war poet, Rupert Brooke said, "When I was twenty two, I considered myself to be inextinguishable". Many used to think in the same way.

So how do we respond to the fact that after a time of flourishing we will die? What positive value can it possibly have to face the fact that my own great, great grandchildren probably won't know my name and that the life which feels so significant to me now felt no less so to my equally unknown great, great grandfather?

It drives us to the one place of solid certainty, to the gracious and eternal God.

At funerals, as I read the words, "But from everlasting to everlasting the LORD'S love is with those who fear him and his righteousness with their children's children", I find myself looking at the grandchildren of the person who has died. As I look at them, I feel a longing for the whole family before me to have a share in that promise.

Life is not solid. There's no point in building up a perfect life in this world, because it could all be taken in a moment. The best way we can possibly spend this uncertain life is to pray and work so that as many people as possible find eternal security that nothing can take away.