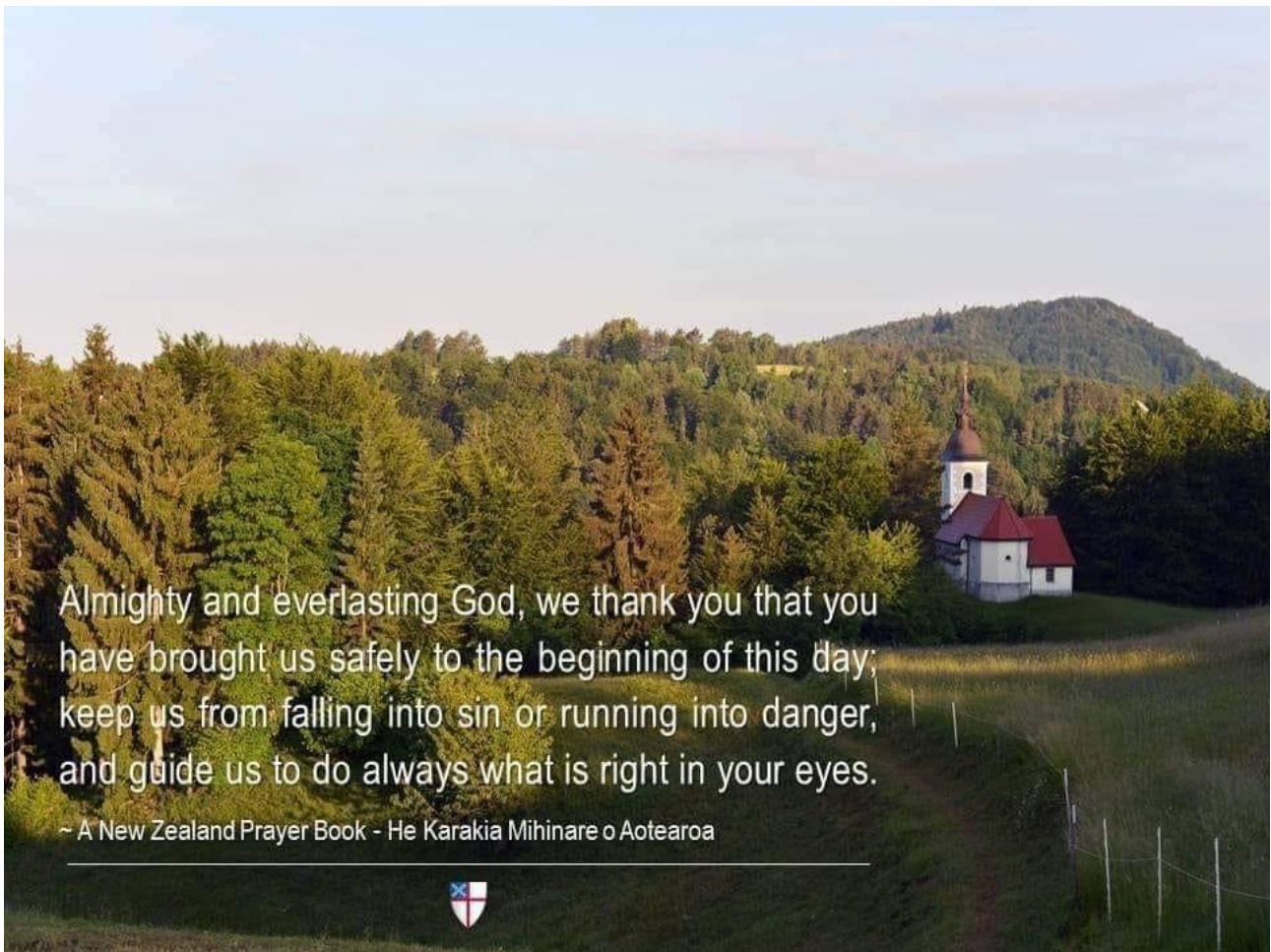


Speaking to the soul



Death

For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better. But if I live, I can do more fruitful work for Christ. So I really don't know which is better. I'm torn between two desires: I long to go and be with Christ, which would be far better for me. But for your sakes, it is better that I continue to live. Philippians 1:21–24

During the two years that I lived in India a number of people in our community died and I deeply appreciated the way in which their deaths were handled. Soon after the person

passed away their body was prepared and laid out on a bed in the middle of the main room of the house. Visitors would then come and pay their respects, light candles around the body, and say prayers. This would continue until the body was taken in an open coffin to church for the funeral service (normally the day after the death). It was all so very different from the way in which our society handles death. When I returned to this country I deeply regretted the way in which we seem to be kept well away from death. In our verses today Paul talks about death in a way that would probably shock many people. He is totally open about death and reflects on the varied benefits of being alive or dead.

Paul's confidence in Christ shines through his words. He knows the Lord so well that he is absolutely convinced that death is the preferable option. For Paul, death was bound to be much better than life, because he would be set free from all those things that obstruct our relationship with Christ here on earth. But he realises that, for the moment, he has responsibilities here on earth and so he is content with staying alive for the time being.

One of the greatest blessings of being a Christian is that we need have no fear of death. Recently a friend of mine, aged 63, died of motor neurone disease. The disease progressed very fast and it was alarming to see how speedily he lost all muscle control. But through it all he kept rejoicing. His confidence in God was so strong that on not a single occasion did I hear him complain. He knew that he was secure in God's hands for time and eternity. I do hope you look to the future with a similar confidence.

QUESTION

Do you share Paul's thoughts about death?

PRAYER

Lord God, thank you that my relationship with you will not be brought to an end by death. Amen