

# Dennis' Funeral

I was dreading Dennis' funeral. It was hard to believe he was really gone anyway, when only a week ago he had seemed so healthy. No one knew he had **heart disease**, not even him.

Now here we were gathering for his **funeral**. People were streaming into the church when I arrived – not surprising really as Dennis was a **popular chap**. Inside, I found a seat halfway to the front and looked over at Dennis' family. **His widow and daughters** were sitting together in the front row, and I felt so terribly sad when I saw them and thought of them having to go on without the **father of the family**. I could feel tears welling up already. How was I going to get through the service?

Soon we were all seated and the vicar walked in from the back of the church, followed by the **pallbearers** with the coffin on their shoulders.

*'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies,'<sup>1</sup>*

called out the **vicar** as he strode to the front of the church. The coffin was placed in the aisle near him, and not far away from **me**. As the service began with one of my **favourite hymns**, I couldn't manage a note. Another look at Dennis' family and I **choked up completely**. Grief for them, for Dennis and for losses in my own life **overwhelmed me**. The hymn was followed by a reading from **the Bible** about nothing being able to separate us from the love of God.<sup>2</sup> In the **prayers**, there was space just to fall apart for a while with sadness. Then some of Dennis' friends stood up and talked about what he was like: **fun** and family loving, **amazingly generous** and always ready for a good debate over **good wine**. They also talked about how antagonistic he had been towards **Christianity** in the past, until one day he had discovered that Jesus was real and found all his ideas turned on their head. He became a **worship leader** in his church and an **inspiration** to others. The vicar's sermon reinforced the image of Dennis as a real man, **warts and all**, but with a very real faith that **transformed his life**. I was glad to hear such an **honest and warming** account of my friend.

The service moved on to **worship**, and to my surprise I found myself gradually able to join in. Dennis' family were singing with **remarkable enthusiasm**, and I found my focus slowly changing from **grief** at Dennis' death to **thankfulness for his life**. Those gut-wrenching tears dried up as I thought how wonderful it was that the God Dennis had got to know here on earth had now **welcomed him into heaven**. The more I worshipped, the more I was struck with how **amazing** it is that death is not a problem for our God. By the time the communion bit of the service began and I went to the front to receive the bread and wine, I was thinking so much about **Jesus** that I did not even notice that I had to brush past the coffin. As one of Dennis' daughters sang a solo about God's **love for us**, and ours for him, I felt very **near to God** and comforted because of that.

Then the vicar commended Dennis into the arms of **God's love and mercy**, reminding us that all his sins had been **forgiven**. It was time to say goodbye.

The service ended with everyone singing their hearts out as the vicar led the procession of coffin and Dennis' family out to the back of the church and off to the crematorium. We were all urged to go to the church hall for a party in celebration of Dennis and his life.

I came away **amazed and enriched**. I had expected to struggle with grief, the **reality of death** and be relieved to get away. As it was, my struggle only accounted for half the experience. I needed time to be **sad** – we all did – and it was there. But my enduring memory of that funeral is one of **privilege and inspiration**. When I die, I hope my friends go away from my funeral feeling the same.

Footnotes:

1 John 11:25

2 Romans 8:38-39