

I'd like to speak this morning if I may about one of the only two things in life, which, according to Benjamin Franklin are unavoidable. No, I'm not going to preach about taxes this morning. Rather something far more interesting – your death.

It has long been part of the Christian tradition to think about our mortality in Lent. We begin on Ash Wednesday with the rather chilling words, “Remember you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Part of what we are trying to do in Lent is to return to an understanding of life that is, so to speak, more creaturely. We are not little gods, we are created, mortal beings. Lent calls us to learn how to live humbly in the creation God gave us as his created sons and daughters. It is about realising afresh that God made us, and that one day, we will all return to him.

At the heart of much of the culture we live in is a complete denial of death's existence, or if it is acknowledged, it is done so with dread terror.

I heard of an undertaker the other day who reported his firm now forbids them from mentioning the word death or the verb to die when they're dealing with bereaved families. Instead, they have to talking about people passing. Passing away, passing on, or passing up.

The grim truth is this. Buses and trains pass by and pass on, but we humans die.

I think one of the most healthy and useful things that Christians can offer the world is the capacity to talk openly and honestly about death from the perspective of our hope for eternal life.

I'd like to talk this morning about how each and every one of us should make appropriate preparations for their death and for their funeral arrangements.

A number of our church officers and members of our PCC have asked me to speak publicly about this in the light of experiences over the past few months when complexities have arisen in this area. I want to lay out quite openly and directly what each and every one of us, no matter what our age, should have prepared for the day we die.

How should a Christian prepare for death? One of the most important things it is the duty of every Christian to undertake is to make sure they have prepared an up-to-date will. On one level this is simply a matter of pragmatic generosity. If you die without a will, it is your nearest and dearest who will have to deal with the complexities you leave behind.

Leaving a will means you can save those you love a lot of trouble in sorting out your affairs.

A well written will is also the biggest antidote I know against family rows after your death. If your wishes are clear and recorded, there is no room for tension in discerning what you wanted.

As part of your will, I would argue it is a Christian duty to make some sort of gift after your death to the work of the church. Contributing in monetary terms to the church's mission is an obligation of Christian discipleship whilst we are alive, so it makes sense to include a legacy of some sort for the church after your death. Your generosity can have a significant effect – even after you've gone to glory.

There are many ways of leaving a legacy to All Saints', particularly to one of our foundations, and I would be happy to discuss that with anyone who wants to.

In addition to having a well drafted will, it is also important that you make clear provision for what you want your funeral to look like. You must write this down. It's not good enough just to tell a couple of friends.

The best thing would be to draw up a document and leave a copy with us, a copy with your solicitor, and a copy with your family or executor, so everyone is clear and agreed about what your wishes are.

It is also important to make clear and realistic provision for the cost of your funeral, especially if you want the choir of All Saints' to sing at it. It needs to be remembered this is not the only way of having a funeral here, but if you want a sung requiem with full choir, you need to budget around £2000 for the cost of music at your funeral.

I am very happy to chat with anyone about making preparations for their funeral, and would welcome the possibility of gradually building up the file in our parish office which contains funeral wishes, so that we have clear instructions for our parishioners who want their funeral rites to take place here.

Do I have all these arrangements laid out? The answer is no. I don't. So I am hereby publicly undertaking to follow my own advice and draw up a document with my own funeral wishes, and make a will containing, amongst other things a legacy for All Saints' Margaret Street. And if I can do that over the next few weeks, I would argue, if you haven't already, so can you.