

# Turn to wonder

by Andrew Norton





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# The grace of dying

Written by Andrew Norton, 16 July 2019

There is a returning, a homecoming, a movement from the unknown to the known, incomplete to complete, fragmented to whole. This returning is what I call the grace of dying.

*"The spirit returns unto God who gave it." – Ecclesiastes 12.7*

This is not in any way new to us; we have experienced this cycle through the seasons every year of our lives.

Summer, autumn, winter and spring; each announce nature's cycle of death and resurrection.

Each season returns and in returning everything turns.

*"There is a time for every season . . .*

*"A time to be born and a time to die."*

*"A time to throw away and a time to gather in."*

These have been our companions all these years and yet we have not held them in our hands long enough for them to speak into our lives or to realise that one day we too may be called to withdraw, let go and to die.

## A quality of relaxation

Thomas More refers to this as *"the emptying of self into the fullness of life"*.

Surrender comes with an unexpected gift at the end of the struggle.

## A quality of withdrawal

There is a time to embrace and a time to let go. To withdraw is to place a new set of priorities around relationships, giving priority to some over others.

Of all that could hold our attention or distract us, there is a sharpening of the participants' senses and of the ego that can capture the focus of our being, or not.

Once you have passed through the grief of letting go, the quality of withdrawal becomes a cleansing process. It is like the Marie Kondo method; where you hold everything in your hands and ask what brings you joy. This becomes what T.S. Eliot called the still point of the turning world.

## A quality of radiance

People who visit me refer to how well I am looking. I think I can't possibly be looking so well when I am in the process of dying and yet the word that continues to arise is the sense of radiance. It's a stillness, a calmness, a peace within that comes together to form this thing call radiance.

## A quality of silence

During this time, you are left alone to yourself for many hours in the day, especially what they call the wee, or long still hours of the night. It is in these times of silence that you learn to embrace the silence and let it comfort rather than torment. There's a quality of interiority where you learn to be comfortable in your own thoughts.

## A quality of interiority

This may sound strange, but as you turn inwards – in on yourself – at first your world becomes much smaller. But as you continue this process it becomes so much bigger. The interior world becomes incredibly spacious, wide, deep and beyond anything you would have ever imagined.

## A quality of the sacred

Finding God amid the dying experience is not at all clear, not at all straight-forward for God can come as the enemy, the one who inflicts this disease.

I don't see God as the one I can't wait to see on the other side. Even that idea is too narrowing or too limiting.

What I do get excited about is that I can meet God now, on this side, without any judgement and in complete freedom.

We need to stop living life in reverse – wishing God would somehow, should or could have given me a better life, would have got this sorted out sooner. Why God have You come so late to the party? It's living life in the present that becomes the sacred gift.

## A quality of transcendence

My dream life is one of complete transcendence and wholeness. It is not a dream of the wishful – it's not of desire, it's all in the present. E.g. My dream of the tree of life is in the transcendent now.

## A quality knowing

There's a strange space where you transcend between being lucid and clear minded, and lost in drug-induced fuzziness. And yet there are breakthrough points where you see and hear things with absolute clarity. It's like, 'boom, where did that come from'. It's an intense clarity, almost frightening. You see it and you say it. It's a gift. I'm not wanting to be insensitive, but I am not going to let people off the hook.

## From tragedy to grace

There's so much about what I'm going through and experiencing I want to yell at the top of my lungs and say 'no', protest at the tragedy of one's own dying; and yet as I go through this process I realise that dying comes not as a tragic event but as a gracious gift. To be gifted with this is nothing other than grace.

## Time and transcendence

While we live off this cliché 'time is short', for some it is shorter than others, and in my case there's a growing awareness that – for me – time is very short.

*"We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time." – T. S. Eliot*

## Postscript

These thoughts are part of a reflective process over the last weeks as I have contemplated cancer and death. Anything I have said is solely my perspective, as I have tried to make peace in the darkness. – 4 September 2019

# Surrender

*Then Jesus said to his disciples, If anyone wishes to come after me, they must deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wishes to save their life will lose it ; but whoever loses their life for my sake will find it. – Matthew 16:24-25*

Have you come  
to the end  
of yourself  
where  
even  
the white flag  
lies  
still  
on the ground beside you?

This  
ending you  
knew,  
feared,  
dreaded,  
struggled against  
and  
ultimately  
defeated you  
is nothing more than a  
lie.

The  
truth  
of  
all  
life is:  
the  
seed must  
die.  
The  
poor  
in spirit  
know what  
happiness  
is.  
Those who fall  
to the ground;  
the humble,  
stand  
strong.



# Ask me

Ask me,  
one day in the available light,  
"What lies ahead?"

We'll go for a walk.  
We'll follow the ridge line track  
there and back.  
We'll drink with our eyes.  
We'll speak with our hearts.  
We'll delight in the clouds.

And I'll ask you,  
"What lies within?"

We'll listen in silence  
for the echoe's return.

That is what lies ahead.

# Hello

I search the horizon but cannot  
see beyond today's unfolding  
- Hello to the unknown.

My bones ache, my breath is  
short, my feet and hands hurt  
- Hello to pain.

The grace of fear  
- Hello to love.

Light painting an azure sky with  
puffs of white clouds  
- Hello to wonder.

A pathway into the mist  
- Hello to mystery.

Now you have it, now you don't  
- Hello to loss.

A hand written card, pure gift  
- Hello to kindness.

Thicker than blood because  
it is a choice  
- Hello to friendship.

Stories of endings  
- Hello to grief.

As champagne to a weary heart  
- Hello to laughter.

"Hosanna" fades as the  
crowd turns  
- Hello to forsaken.

I ask God "why?" so I may  
gain wisdom  
- Hello to silence.

In the shadows I'm at home in  
the womb of creation  
- Hello to darkness.

Sunlight through the rain  
- Hello to hope.

Hello to life,  
yes,  
to all of it!

Hello!

## Turn to wonder

When  
the going gets  
tough,  
turn to  
wonder;  
a crack that  
catches  
the light  
by  
a  
sideways glance,  
invading  
the darkness of  
questions  
that only make  
sense  
from the  
other side.

Wonder,  
like the burning bush  
frees you  
from  
all  
names  
spoken  
over your  
life.

Wonder,  
like sky,  
once held  
every  
drop  
that became  
an ocean,  
a well  
to quench  
the deepest of  
thirst.

Wonders'  
weight  
turning gravity  
into  
gravitas  
of heart,  
mind  
and  
soul.

# Magnolia

The magnolia outside my window  
is pregnant with hope  
The buds are swelling  
looking for a day of appearance  
I too am looking for that day  
A sign in the grey of winter  
that tells of another season to come.

If today you are caught in winter's grey grip,  
go find a magnolia pregnant with hope.

# Bewildered

Be  
wildered  
by the elements  
and  
a life that refuses  
to be  
tamed.

Go to the  
frontier  
of your  
wild imaginings  
and  
get thoroughly  
lost.

It is in  
exile  
you find the  
consolation  
of home  
and  
a pathway  
that leads you  
back.

# Winter willows

The winter willows'  
naked  
blush  
caught my  
gaze,  
forsaken  
of leaves  
but not of  
hope.

Hope  
waits  
till  
all  
is  
laid  
bare.

Hope, like  
branches  
ripening;  
twice reflected  
on water  
and  
within  
my  
eyes.

# Pieces of love

And  
when I  
fall  
I want to  
break  
into  
ten thousand  
pieces  
of  
love

more  
than enough  
to  
feed  
a hungry world.

# In another room

You speak  
of God  
as  
if  
in  
another room.

Brave and cowardice  
words  
easily  
spoken  
when not  
face  
to  
face.

I'd rather  
no God  
than  
one who  
plays  
hide 'n seek.

Heaven's  
door  
is  
bolted  
open  
in the name  
of  
Emmanuel.



# Tired eyes

Tired eyes  
weigh thimbles in lead  
abandoned by sight  
seeking the horizon  
searching the edges for light  
close for relief.



Andrew Norton: husband, father, preacher,  
priest, prophet, photographer and poet.  
He embraced life, faith, family, friends and work  
with keen perception and vigorous passion.

26 May 1958 – 9 September 2019

For more of Andrew's creative works,  
visit: [www.andrewnorton.co.nz](http://www.andrewnorton.co.nz)

