

Views from the Pews: Poems of remembrance

Do not stand
By my grave, and weep.
I am not there,
I do not sleep—
I am the thousand winds that blow
I am the diamond glints in snow
I am the sunlight on ripened grain,
I am the gentle, autumn rain.
As you awake with morning's hush,
I am the swift, up-flinging rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight,
I am the day transcending night.
Do not stand
By my grave, and cry—
I am not there,
I did not die.

Clare Harner (1909–1977)

Twice a year, in April and November, we commemorate the lives lost in useless wars, and feel again the desolation of families left behind. It is right and proper that we do so, to honour the graves of our war dead and to remind us all to do whatever we can to prevent new conflicts. But the grief and destruction of war keeps on coming, as current events in Ukraine and elsewhere fill our news feeds every day. Despair at human stupidity seems close at times. So it must have seemed to those who heard the dire prophesies of today's reading from Luke 21.

Yet Christians can take heart, both in the vision of the peaceable kingdom in Isaiah 65, and in the final words of Luke 21:19, that for us all forms of death will be defeated in the end. We have Jesus' own assurance that we will then no longer be attached to our earthly remains. On the contrary, our living souls will have long since fled to some unimaginably better place. That conviction is beautifully expressed in Harner's poem, written shortly after the death of her

brother. We can thank her for the wonderfully comforting idea that, even while we miss them and visit their graves, we can still remember those we love and have lost, not just at a particular site, but everywhere, through the many blessings of innocent nature that always surround us.

Kim King