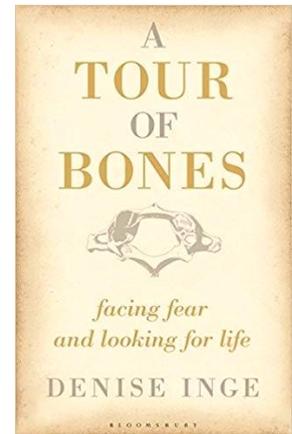


# Denise Inge

## A Tour of Bones - facing fear and looking for life

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Notes AM May 2016 (italics = my summary, bold = quotes)



### 1. The Charnel House

'I live over dead men's bones. Dead women's, too, for all I know. Every day when I leave my house to escort my children to school, I walk over them. Beneath my hectic life they lie, dormant, deteriorating in increments, shifting perhaps imperceptibly when the ground around them shivers. In a perfect unity of name and action that I cannot begin to emulate, they do what they are, they remain. They make no noise about it. They insist on nothing, demand or require nothing of me except the admission, which I make seldom and reluctantly, that one day I shall join them in bare beauty, stripped even of flesh and sinews, disjointed, naked and alone.' 1

*Charnel house beneath the bishop's house in Worcester.*

'From this belly of our house I began a kind of quest into fear so that I might overcome it and learn about living life unfrightened.' *She wrote the book before being diagnosed with cancer — it didn't cause it, but it did prepare her for it. Death is so often, given the curability of many diseases, seen as a failure. So we look the other way, and avoid talking about it.*

'We know that human love often fails, yet we see that for some people it endures. We yearn to be among that happy few. Our flesh may rot but we want our love at least to be immortal. Shakespeare's sonnets, Rodin's 'Kiss', the Taj Mahal all say so. In monuments of verse and stone our best artists have decreed that love is eternal. In our loving, the great human yearning towards eternity is voiced and sanctified. Yet we only come to know this when love is set in parameters of birth and death. Living love is enjoyed; it is only after death that love becomes immortal. And if love is immortal, is the beloved immortal also? These questions go right to the heart of how we understand ourselves. Much of the time, we pretend that death isn't a part of life. Yet, death is a crucial part of the human condition; when we avoid talking about death we avoid talking about life. This is what the bones in my cellar are telling me. Look at us, they say. Are we all that remains? Cancer or not, you will be like us one day. And what will be left of you then?' 13

*After the heart stops, brain cells die within 3-7 minutes. In the climate of the W Hemisphere it takes 12 months for the body to rot down to bone; centuries for the bone to become dust. The decomposition process begins with micro organisms in the intestines, then spreads to other parts of the body. It takes 50 years for the bones to become dry and brittle in a coffin. A body decomposes 8x faster in the open air, and 2x faster in water. Some conditions cause mummification — eg a crypt with a constant moderate temperature and air movement; freezing conditions.*

'If, since living in this house, I have thought more frequently about the brevity of life and the longevity of bones, I have also thought more about fear, about how all fears lead back to the fear of death — and how, if you are going to live an unfrightened life, you need to face that head on. I don't know exactly how you do this, but I suspect integrity and an unflinching mettle are required.' ... *Thoreau decided he 'wished to live deliberately', so went to live in a cabin in the woods. This wish is a fierce wish, which 'required him to search out the corners where life lived. Writing my way into this book I have realized that what often scares us about the brevity of life is the fear that we have not yet found those corners, or that we may not have truly lived, and may never live, before our time is run out. We fear we may miss our one brief moment. Thanks to our advancing skill at body repair, we live longer and longer. Yet we know, somewhere between the celebrations, that life is more than not dying.'* 27-28

### 2. Czerwna

*A hamlet near the ancient spa town of Kduowa Zdroj, near Nachod, in a region once known as Silesia, now in Poland. Mineral waters were noted there in a chronicle of 1580. In the C19th the waters were found to have healing properties, and people began to flock there. Denise and her friend Zuzana were there to visit the Beinhaus — bone house; also called a Skull Chapel. The parish priest Vaclav Tomaszek gathered bones emerging from the mass graves of victims of past wars, or epidemics and starvation. He built it in 1776 as a place of reconciliation. Solid walls of skulls and femurs, packed into a small room. School children visit.*

*Czerwna is about reconciliation between the bones of people who had died fighting one another.*

### 3. Sedlec

*Ossuary at Sedlec, in Czech Republic, built into bone chandeliers and skull pyramids. The ossuary was started in 1400. In 1870 Frantisek Rint created a great bone sculpture in the shape of a chalice, and another as a chandelier. There are towers of bones, hanging bones, pyramids of skulls...*

*Sedlec has a Cistercian cathedral, and in 1278 the abbot is said to have brought back from the Holy Land a handful of soil which he sprinkled on the Sedlec cemetery, making it hallowed and bestowing on it special properties which would enable the body to rot quickly, releasing the soul to Paradise. A myth arose - burial here would guarantee a place in heaven within 3 days of death. So people journeyed from all over Europe as they neared death. A Cistercian monk began to arrange them carefully; the tradition continued. The current administrator sees people arrive noisy and leave quiet; 'there is something you can't explain about this place, it opens people up.'*

*Sedlec is about the restoration of order and dignity.*

'I have seen how unresolved things can sometimes solve themselves if you just lay them aside for awhile. Along comes a conversation, a book, a dream; the conscious and the subconscious work together on the problem, conspiring in the corner of your busy days like crossword fanatics, and you find, when you go to look at the problem again, that it has changed. Its thorns have grown less prickly, it is a less puzzling colour. Sometimes it is no longer on the problem shelf at all but has grown wings of its own and flown (or feet perhaps and toddled off) - even the new shape of it you don't know, nor its mode of transport, if it has entirely disappeared.

This is what I did with Sedlec. For hours, against the window pane, elongated drops chased each other like small eels down rivulets of rain. My thoughts did much the same as I scratched busily in my lined notebook, registering my disquiet, examining as much of the roots of it as I could see, noting the images that came to mind, and then I left it.' 80

'What drove people to Sedlec in their thousands throughout the Middle Ages and beyond was a belief in a real and personal resurrection. What on earth were they thinking? With that question in my head, and an awareness of my own resurrection ignorance, I started investigating and discovered that what they thought was not exactly what previous generations had thought about the resurrection. In fact, theories of the resurrection and images of the resurrection have altered much over time. When we speak of 'life after death' now, we usually mean the life that follows immediately after bodily death, but the earliest sense of 'resurrection' did not mean this. It meant 'new life after a period of being dead. the modern theologian N. T. Wright notes in his magisterial study on the resurrection, while pagans denied the possibility of resurrection, some Jews affirmed it as a long-term hope, and Christians claimed that it had already happened to Jesus and in the future would happen to them; but for all of them resurrection' was 'a two-step story. It was in effect, life after 'life after death. notes that this meaning was constant throughout the ancient world until the second century:

In *The Resurrection of the Body* (Columbia University Press, 1995), Caroline Walker Bynum studies theories of the resurrection in Western Christianity from AD 200 to 1336. She notes that of all the 'so-called world religions' only those that arose in the Mediterranean Basin or the Middle East - Zoroastrianism, rabbinic Judaism, Christianity and Islam - hold a doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The Ancients, although they did write about life after death, never held that there would be a bodily resurrection. For Homer the body was real and the soul, after death, not more than a lamentable shadow of self, a wraith, For Plato or Cicero, the spirit was real and the body was a prison house. There might be life after death after death but not a resurrection; those who followed Homer knew they wouldn't get a body and those who followed Plato didn't want one. Resurrection was a radical and often offensive notion in the Greco-Roman world. For those who believed it, it was also an imminently expected event. In the first millennium after Christ, Christians expected the physical return of Christ and the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth' right then and there. When this did not happen, new theories of the resurrection began to emerge, beginning with the 'seed'.

The oldest Christian metaphor for the resurrection of the body is the seed from 1 Corinthians 15, in which a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies and lives again. The seed image is also present in Islam (Sura 56.60-1) and in rabbinic Judaism.

For early Christians the body remained an inescapable carrier of identity so that by around 200 AD both Tertullian, writing in Latin, and Irenaeus, writing in Greek, were defending the importance of the body as much as ever. But a paradox remained. As Walker Bynum notes: 'Body is flux and frustration, a locus of pain and process. If it becomes impassible and incorruptible, how is it still body? If it remains body, how is its resurrection either possible or desirable? To put it simply: if there is change, how can there be continuity and hence identity? If there is continuity, how will there be change and hence glory?'

Going back to the biblical image of the seed - if a sheaf of wheat sprouts from a seed buried in the earth, in what sense is that sheaf, which is new matter and a new structure, the redemption of the seed? How is the newly sprung wheat the same, and in any case why is similarity salvation? Early Christians such as Methodius, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, the Syriac writers, Ambrose and Augustine all wrestled with these issues in the face of pagans who found the idea of resurrection perplexing... Then in the 390s theologians came back to the first-century Church Father, Origen of Alexandria, who had noted that in fact continuity and transformation are already happening in the human body and that they happen all the time. 'For this reason, river is not a bad name for the body since, strictly speaking, the initial substratum in our bodies is perhaps not the same for even two days. Yet the real Paul or Peter, so to speak, is always the same.'

He wrote about this change that remains recognizable as being based on an *eidōs*, or 'form' in the Platonic sense, a kind of plan coupled with a seminal capacity for growth and development. Origen's *eidōs* is a pattern that organizes the flux but retains an essential propensity for growth. At once coherent and dynamic, it operates, as Walker Bynum notes, 'a bit like a genetic code.'

Although images of the resurrected body in Christianity continued to evolve over the centuries, what endured was the idea that the body was necessary to salvation because the body was necessary to any idea of self. By the time the Cistercians were moving across Europe towards Sedlec, the early image of seed that grows into a different and glorious sheaf was being replaced by the image of dust or 'earth' as the Cistercian Bernard of Clairvaux called it. His 'earthy' body represents both filth and decay and, at the same time, the stuff out of which the new, necessary and desirable resurrected body is made; to be 'earth' and 'dust' is to be the lowliness out of which something can be made. His point is that resurrection is pure miracle, rather than a natural process.' 83-88

*So the remains at Sedlec were not mere biological waste, but a necessary part of what it means to be a person - necessary even to the miracle of resurrection. This resurrection would be not like the initial creation of matter - not ex nihilo, but ex vetere (the old) or even ex terrae pulvere (the dust). So people come to believe that at least a femur and a skull were needed for resurrection. By the 17th it was a single atom, and after the Enlightenment it became an idea rather than a physical reality. A preference for soul over body developed, and life after death became a spiritual existence. Theories continue to emerge - Polkinghorne suggests it's the information-bearing pattern which survives - this is what the soul is. So the big question about the resurrection is this: what changes, and what stays the same?*

'As I discover new things about the development of beliefs concerning the resurrection, the whole doctrine seems more and more significant to me because I see that, from earliest times, what was being debated was not only something supernatural but also something fundamentally human - this dynamic tension of continuity and transformation. Every day, in fact, we live this dynamic as our cells reproduce, making us always who we are and yet each day one day older either growing or ageing - in any case, transforming into what we will eventually be.

I can see now why it is that, over millennia and across cultures and despite our present-day mantra that only the empirically evident is real, we humans have not been able to lay down the idea of a life beyond this one, and we continue to wonder and debate what that life might imply. Questions about the resurrection are inescapable because they are really questions about what it means to be simultaneously and inextricably both spiritual and physical.

I begin to understand what Sedlec was telling me. Sedlec was about possibility and the quest to find a lasting hope. Its story is about resurrection, about what might be possible that we do not understand, about hoping in the midst of doubt, or the possibility that what we hope for may never be.

It is not so much about believing the impossible but believing that, because our knowledge is limited, there may be many possibilities of which we have not conceived. It is about leaving room for the improbable or at least the unproven; actually, not just leaving room, but actively making room. It is the daring act of staking a claim in the unprovable. That is what makes it hope rather than optimism, because it is active. It does more than wait to see what will be; it acts prior to proof. It is audacious.

The question that Sedlec wanted to ask me is simply this: Have you found a lasting hope? 89

*And yet that's not all there is to it - resurrection is not just about what happens after death.*

'What good does believing in life after death do if it means you just put off living? Why is so much of life such a mess? If hope is hushed frustration, what good is it? And who would want such a hope?

The kind of resurrection that starts happening now in the ordinary present is the kind that most captures my imagination. Resurrection life in which somehow future joy breaks in on the present, as if time wraps around itself and what will be actually happens. I have sometimes seen bold changes in which people's lives are made new already, here, in this world, and the wonderful thing is that new life of that kind spills over. It spreads like watercolour soaking up across a glistening page. This kind of resurrection hope makes me want to cheer...

Whatever we mean by salvation is finally bound to a body. This encourages me, for it helps me to see that my frustration with prevalent talk about the resurrection is not unfounded. Maybe it is right to be frustrated with an idea of resurrection that defers new life and takes it away from material reality. I have little idea what a resurrected body after death might be like, but I can have a very good idea of what a resurrected life might look like now. And that is something towards which one can turn.

To be hope at all (rather than some kind of vague optimism or fanciful dream) hope must have one foot in the mud. This is what I have come to understand. We think we need a dream. We are urged to 'climb every mountain' till we find it (roll Julie Andrews in slow motion on a mountain top). But what we really need is hope. Humans cannot live without it. We can do without many things: without holidays, without delicacies, without as much money as we thought we needed - even, as I have come lately to see, without the promise of a good prognosis. But we cannot live well for long without hope.

Hope is not the same thing as optimism. Optimism says that things will get better. Hope says that the good we envisage is the good we work towards. Optimism is largely passive: it is about waiting for what is better to come to you. Hope is active: it goes out and does. It falls and fails sometimes, but it is tenacious and unafraid, and it survives long after optimism is dashed. Optimism daydreams; hope has confidence. It is awake. It will not let go of the notion that the good is real, and that we can find it.

The three-day resurrection myth associated with the charnel house at Sedlec was ' what first invited me to discover more about the development of the doctrine of resurrection. The discontinuities there at Sedlec, between medieval mounds and Rint garlands, between the solemn and the frivolous, between the solidarity of anonymous skulls and the singular superiority of the Schwarzenburg crest, and the overarching question left unresolved - 'What are these bones, artist's material or sleeping people? - disquieted my thoughts. Now, they seem to me somehow fitting conundrums in a charnel house devoted so specifically to the doctrine of the resurrection - a doctrine which, from its earliest days of debate over continuity and transformation, has been both subversive of the prevailing culture and tangled in paradox.' 91-92

#### **4. Hallstatt**

You look at something that has previously appeared in one way and suddenly it is something else. The same thing, only different. I think about the bones I have seen, mountains of them, and how they bring the present day into relief. It is as if our present wouldn't exist without them. Not only because of biology, the inheritance of DNA, not only because of invention - all the layers of things our ancestors have made that have brought us to modernity; it is not only because of what they have left behind, but because, if you learn to listen to the speech that is not words, they may speak still. Their dead yesterdays make present life leap with possibility, make the present moment alive and sweet.' 97

*Hallstatt means salt settlement; village perched on rock sloping down into a lake; salt has been extracted there since the Bronze Age. In 1846 it turned out there was a Bronze Age necropolis there - astonishingly well preserved remains. There is now an ossuary attached to the Catholic church. People are buried in the cemetery for 10-15 years, then dug up, and the skulls are bleached in the open air on a shelf. Then the skull painter paints their skulls - mostly traditional designs, and then arranges them in the ossuary in their families. Their dates of birth and death are written with their names on their foreheads. They seem to ask you questions - what's your name; how will you be remembered? Denise feels alone among all these names, families:*

'I wish I belonged. I wish I knew where. There, miles from anywhere I know, I really feel, deep in my bones, the ramifications of the decisions I made years ago when I left my country and went to live in another one. The deep displacement of adaptation. The thousands of losses, the thousands of assimilations by which I have become someone my childhood self would not know. Beyond that I feel, even deeper down, the strange aloneness of the human being. Naked we come into this world and naked we go out of it. Without pomp, without ceremony, accompanied by pain, and without a shred of dignity, except the simple dignity of being human. If we are not loved in the midst of this truth how can we live? I breathe in deeply. I take the air of this place down into my toes. It is not like the air in my charnel house at home. Apart from the faint scent of candle smoke, it is fresh. You can breathe safely here. If you need to, you can escape easily any time you like through a normal door with hinges. And because I can leave easily I do not need to. I stay. With my eyes closed. And I think about my name, my simple name, painted.' 121

'When we were, in the main, believers, our story was a story of faith with its virtues and vices and its panoply of saints, heroes and villains. What are the stories to which we now go for inspiration and instruction? They may be many and various, but it is less and less likely they are held in common. I wonder whether part of our modern sense of placelessness may have to do with the fact that our individual stories have nowhere to congregate, no family of stories of which they know themselves to be a part. My story and your story long to be part of a larger story. At Hallstatt I felt, deep in my bones, the importance of cherishing not only our individual memories, but also this sea, the memories of our peoples and our tribes.' 130

#### **5. Naters**

*Switzerland. A little chapel in a cobbled piazza, opposite the church, half below ground level. People pass, slowing, pausing as they travel through the square, acknowledging - what? There's an iron grille, and behind it the remains of 30,000 people, 3x the number of living residents. A wall of bones.*

'The charnel house at Naters states so clearly what in fact all the charnel houses have been saying. Here it is written in gold, succinct and unavoidable: I will be, like that, ash-white bone. I need the unflinching simplicity of that reality check because, like the vast majority of North Americans, I was brought up quite unconsciously in an atmosphere that denied death and that denial has stayed with me despite the loss of several people I have loved. There have been church funerals and family funerals, with real tears and heavy sobs; yet when the tears subside, the reality of death seems for me to subside with them.' 149

*We deny death. We hold thanksgiving services instead of funerals, we don't wear black, we are expected to get over it. other cultures and religions allow their members to grieve, wail, even perform outlandish displays of mourning. We conquer,*

particularly in her native US; we don't die. We delete the word death, and associated words - a cemetery becomes a funeral park, we dress the body in clothes not a shroud. It's a kind of bullying - you have to pay for it all, and what feels like deference is manipulation. As early as the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries our dialogue with the dead, and the speech about death that was a normal part of life throughout the Middle Ages, began to grow silent. *Not just about the advances of medicine, but also about the concept of the individual overtaking that of the communal, corporate [NB!!]. Spiritualists began to speak to the dead. Scientists worried away at cyronics.*

One thing we do know: we will in fact die. Defer it though we may, we cannot in the end avoid it. Wouldn't it be better to look that short fact straight in the face now and let its reality burn the dross from our days? Thoreau said it like this:

If you stand right fronting, and face to face to a fact, you will see the sun glimmer on both its surfaces, as if it were a cimeter, and feel its sweet edge dividing you through the heart and marrow, and so you will happily conclude your mortal career. Be it life or death, we crave only reality. If we are really dying, let us hear the rattle in our throats and feel cold in the extremities; if we are alive, let us go about our business.

It seems to me that here at the Naters charnel house, where you can visit the dead almost accidentally, that is what people do. They go about their business aware of a stark inevitability most of us attempt to avoid.

Proust wrote:

I think that life would suddenly seem wonderful to us if we were threatened to die as you say. Just think of how many projects, travels, love affairs, studies, it - our life - hides from us, made invisible by our laziness which, certain of a future, delays them incessantly. But let all this threaten to become impossible for ever, how beautiful it would become again! AN If only the cataclysm doesn't happen this time, we won't miss visiting the new galleries of the Louvre, throwing ourselves at the feet of Miss X, making a trip to India. The cataclysm doesn't happen, we don't do any of it, because we find ourselves back in the heart of normal life, where negligence deadens desire. And yet we shouldn't have needed the cataclysm to love life today. It would have been enough to think that we are humans, and that death may come this evening.' 156-7

*A man visits, regularly. He says: 'The meaning of life is in the not knowing what will be after you die. Not knowing is the meaning because it makes you rely on grace. People look for meaning in fun, but meaning is found only in giving. You should give yourself as a present, without expectation of return. Then you are weak, and when you are weak you are humble.*

'The human moment is brief, these stories say, and likely fraught with pain and disappointment, but it is beautiful. This I think is the essence of humility - not a grovelling negation of the self, but the grace to admit one's weakness and to receive enough love, strength or grace for each day. Are you on the path of true humility?' this charnel house is asking me. Humility? I don't even know if I have the courage to wish for this.' 161

## 6. Grave statements

*We die with things left unsaid— why did her father want to be buried with his father in law not his father?* He didn't tell me everything about himself in life, and I don't expect to know him perfectly either in death. You can love without knowing entirely. Most of us do. It is perhaps partly because many of us die with things left unsaid that the disposal of remains becomes a kind of final utterance. Your choice of a burial site is perhaps one of the last things you can say.

'What will survive of us is love,' writes Larkin. Instinctively I want this to be true. Indeed, I yearn for this to be true. And I know that I am not alone in this wish, for the same sentiment can be found in countless poems and books, and even in the picture books that I have read to my children. We humans cannot believe that this great energizing force, this lifespan of longings fulfilled and unfulfilled, expressed and unspoken, that we call love can simply cease. It seems too great a thing ever to be extinguished. That love survives, my whole heart leaps to say. And yet, it makes no sense, for love is an action as much as a feeling: when I stir for the fourth time in the middle of the night to go to my troubled child's bedside, I might be feeling intense frustration, but what I am doing is love. Love is active. Even were love merely a feeling, it would still require a living creature in order to exist, just as an action requires an actor.

What can we possibly mean when we say that what survives of us is love? Who is doing the loving and who is receiving it? If we say that the love lives on in those whom the deceased has loved, as if they had become saturated with love that would squeeze itself out in the world, this is no better. For the love that leaks from them onto the ones they in turn love is their love, not some imported love. We want our loves particular, not amorphous - the love of the beloved, not secondhand generic love. I do not wish it to be true but a part of me admits that, if we simply cease to be, our loving too must cease. Unless of course we say that loving is a kind of energy which continues when the matter to which it is bound ceases. Or unless we hope for a resurrection.' 171

We have lost so many of our stories. One of the most significant of these, I believe, is our loss of a narrative of meaning which for countless people over many generations was rooted in an overarching story of faith. In Philip Larkin's poem 'Church Going' he stands in a building that for many has lost its day-to-day importance, imagining its eventual emptiness

and how when it is a ruin it will still speak something its listeners can hardly understand. And what remains when disbelief has gone?' asks Larkin. The answer he gives is: a sense that here was held in unity 'what since is found only in separation

While Larkin's poem suggests that in the cross of ground we understand ourselves and the transitions in our lives - marriage, baptism, death - in terms of what holds them and us together, increasingly we understand ourselves and our transitions in terms of collapse. We understand the parameters of marriage at its divorce rather than at its duration, and death as a finality rather than a gateway.

Where a medieval worldview understood life by how it held together, we who have dissected the tadpole and divided the atom understand our world as much by how it falls apart. This is not a condemnation. This way of thinking has brought us so very many rewards, but it has also left us in some ways fragmented. Not only are we physically more mobile, we are also spiritually more eclectic, picking and mixing from a range of philosophies and beliefs. Added to this is a kind of social looseness - through social mobility and through social networking, we scatter our seeds of friendship more widely than ever before. We may belong less profoundly to any one place, but we visit a wider variety of places; we may not belong to any one person for a lifetime, but in the tabulation of virtual friends many belong to us.

Perhaps the increasing tendency to scatter ashes is one expression of these scattered lives. Apparently happy not to be remembered past the living memory of those family and friends who have loved us in life, we mingle with the earth in unmarked places, on hilltops, and at sea. Is this, I wonder, because we haven't stayed in one place long enough to feel that we belong there deeply? Does place no longer spell out belonging? Or is it simply that length and depth are not the same thing - that we may feel deeply drawn to places with which we have no lengthy connection.

It is not at all uncommon for our dying wishes to name a place for the scattering of ashes that is a place we loved but not one in which we lived - rather one that we visited, one that revived our souls, much as Betjeman's was revived by the Cornish coast. Here we were taken out of ourselves, or restored to ourselves. Here we felt most alive. This seems to me to be marking not where we lived our everyday lives but where we wish we'd lived. We must attempt a final arrival at some longed-for place. Is this an interpretation of heaven, I wonder? We have no idea where our soul may go, but we want to make sure our body ends up somewhere special. I can see the attraction of this, but I can't help also feeling that the implication of wanting to be scattered somewhere that meant something to us is that the ordinary neighbourhoods of our days had not enough meaning for us. It is as if we have spent a life wishing to be elsewhere, or focused on somewhere we are not. We have lost either the will or the ability to see that where we are is the place of meaning.' 17273

*Tillich describes 3 stages of anxiety in Western civilisation:*

1. Ancient world - anxiety about our fate
2. Medieval world- anxiety concerning guilt and condemnation
3. Modern Age - anxiety about meaninglessness

*The medieval mind took particular care of human remains in the fear of eternal judgement; the modern mind looks for solutions that combat the fear of ultimate meaninglessness. The question is different, but the carrier the same: our bodies. Bones are a metaphor for the enduring and the essential, the deep things that remain once the skin and muscle of life is gone. The questions the charnel houses ask stir us to life-enriching responses: are the broken parts of your life being healed? Have you found a lasting hope? What are the things for which you will be remembered? Are you on a path of true humility?*

What I have been surprised to discover, as these questions chase and wash over me, is that preparing to live and preparing to die are in the end the same thing. 188