

# Hope for the missing

by Ian Woodley

**S**urprisingly, it's the quietness of my mum's house that unnerves me. I say that as someone who loves the still moment as an opportunity to ponder life.

My dad was a man who loved watching TV. Indeed, he liked introducing me to new films or TV programmes that I hadn't come across before. However, the house is now quiet. The Universe doesn't feel right: there is a piece missing that was there only a short time ago. Or, as I should say, a person is missing. The incurable illness finally won and my dad died. He is no longer here.

It does not feel right that the lives of the people we love just cease. I have great memories, but the life force, the soul that created those memories, has vanished. A gap has opened up in the world, a hole that seems irreversible.

Is that it? As I sit in the unusual silence of the house, I consider the evidence.

There is nothing to satisfy the scientific examination of, say, Professor Brian Cox, a well-known scientist, TV presenter, and humanist. I neither see nor hear anything that gives hope. I am aware that there is no test, no experiment that would give any indication of whether there is any future life for my dad.

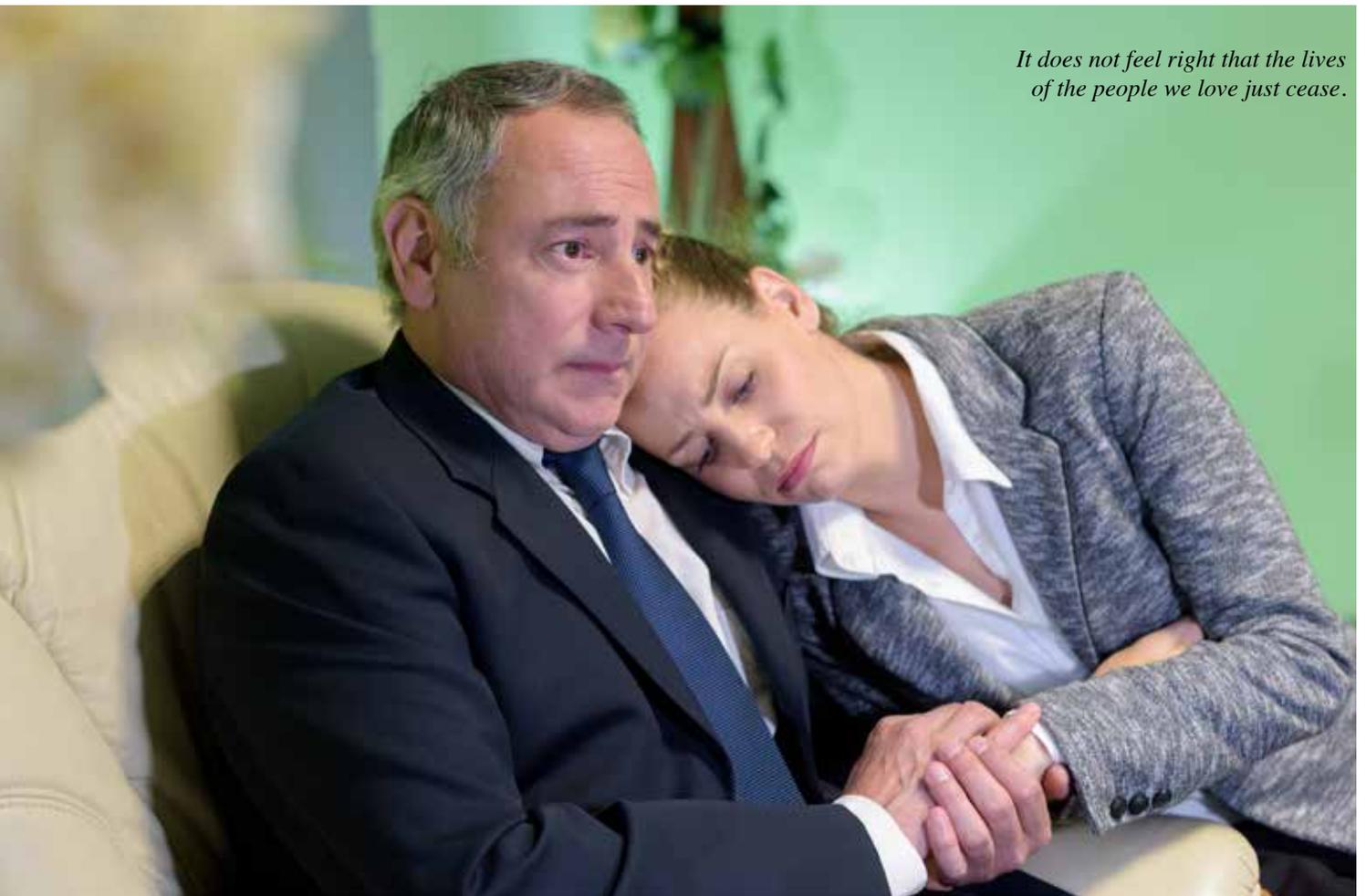
My mind ponders the story of a woman called Mary.

She had an incredible story to tell. Someone she looked up to, a man who had helped her in her time of need, had suffered a terrible miscarriage of justice. The charges against him were trumped up. The city's governor, who saw through the plot, failed to act. Her friend was found guilty and condemned to death. A seemingly tragic end.

But the story did not end there. A few days later, Mary went to pay her respects. The body was gone. Mary broke down sobbing, believing that the body had been stolen. And then...in an amazing twist, that no-one expected...there he was. Mary's friend was alive!

How should I view that story? Should I believe or doubt? Well, there is another surprising witness to this story. A man called Thomas, who did

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Sebastiano del Piombo (1485–1547) painted “The Resurrected Christ”, imagining Thomas’ encounter with the resurrected Jesus, who challenged him to stop doubting and believe. The painting hangs in the side altar of San Nicolo church in Treviso, Italy.

not believe Mary’s experiences. He demanded better evidence that their friend was alive again. And who can blame him?

Thomas got more than he bargained for. One week later he found himself confronted by that better evidence. There was his friend, right there in front of him! What’s more, his friend challenged Thomas directly: “Stop doubting and believe”.

These two stories were recorded by a third witness, a man called John. John also recorded his experiences: he saw his friend die, he saw the empty grave, and then he saw his friend alive again.<sup>1</sup>

Jesus—the friend of Mary, Thomas, and John—had conquered the impossible. Jesus had taken on death, and won! I could go on and consider the other witnesses: the Pharisee Saul, who met the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, then Peter, Cleopas, and James. In fact, Saul (later

called Paul) claimed that over 500 people saw Jesus after his resurrection.<sup>2</sup> Something must have

galvanised these people, because they started the movement we now call Christianity.

So, there is hope. Hope for me, hope for my dad, and hope for you. In the silence of my parents’ house, with no scientific evidence to hand, I asked myself: “Is that it?”

The story of Jesus tells us “No, that isn’t it”. We all know people who are now missing from this world. Yet, Jesus tells us that he is saving up the day when he will put that all right. “I am the resurrection and the life”, he once told a grieving lady called Martha. And to demonstrate that he could make such a bold statement, he brought Martha’s dead brother Lazarus back to life.<sup>3</sup>

I miss my dad. But I know we will meet again. For Jesus has defeated death and we will all one day benefit.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All these stories are recorded in John’s account of Jesus’ life, chapter 20.
- <sup>2</sup> Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church, chapter 15:3-7.
- <sup>3</sup> John’s account of Jesus’ life, chapter 11.



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