

**'A sermon idea for the funeral of a person suffering from dementia: An extract from a sermon preached by Paul Beasley-Murray at the funeral of Alan Wilkinson',  
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Paul says to Timothy: "The time of my departure (*analsis*) has come" (2 Tim 4.6 NRSV). He uses the same metaphor in his letter to the church at Philippi: "For me, living is Christ and dying is gain... I am hard pressed between the two: my desire is to depart (*analsai*) and be with Christ, for that is far better..." (Phil 1.21, 23 NRSV). As a chemist Alan might have found it interesting that Paul uses a Greek word (*analsis*) from which we get our English word 'analysis', which involves a separating of items from each other.

It is also a word which denotes the loosing of a ship from its moorings and was often used as a euphemism for death. In the ancient classical world the passage into the afterlife was viewed as a voyage down the River Styx into the underworld. Coins were placed in the eyes of the deceased to pay the ferry pilot, who would give the dead person passage into the after-life.

Over against the pagans of his day, Paul, of course, had a much more positive view of the world to come. The journey he faced was a journey across the sea of death into the haven of eternity, where on his arrival he would be "with Christ".

Charles Henry Brent (1862-1929), a former bishop in the American Episcopal Church, got to the heart of the metaphor when he wrote: "What is dying? I am, standing on the seashore. A ship sails to the morning breeze and starts for the ocean. She is an object of beauty and I stand watching her till at last she fades on the horizon and someone at my side says, 'She is gone'. Gone where? Gone from my sight, that is all... Just at the moment when someone at my side says, 'she is gone', there are others who are watching her coming, and other voices take up a glad shout, 'There she comes' and that is dying".

But is there more to the metaphor? I believe there is. To unloose the moorings of a boat is to set it free to sail away. When Paul was writing to Timothy, his ship was still tied up. But coming towards the end of his life, he longed to cast anchor – to unloose his moorings - and sail away. He wanted to be free of all life's restrictions and limitations. He wanted to leave this world for the next.

Surely the same must have been true for Alan. After years of increasing dementia, death for him was a 'blessed release'. Death for Alan marked the moment when the restrictions of this life are over. To paraphrase the words of Martin Luther King's epitaph, Alan is:

*Free at last, free at last  
Thank God Almighty he is free at last".*

The fact is that our bodies do ultimately wear out – we are but mortal beings. But thank God there is more to life than this life. For those who have put their trust in Jesus, there is another world to enjoy. A world free of physical restriction, a world lived in the very presence of God. Death is but a setting sail for a new and better world – and loved ones and

friends who have gone on ahead, are waiting to greet us.