



Memorial service for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

St Andrew's Cathedral

September 21, 2022

John 14:1-6

On the day the news broke of the death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I was surprised but not alone in finding myself overcome with emotion. Prime Ministers and policemen and countless visitors to this cathedral, throughout the day and days since, were in tears. Perhaps it was that we did not know how much we loved her. Grief is the price we pay for love, the late Queen once said.

Though most of us never met her, it was a love nurtured by Her Late Majesty's lifetime of unstinting and generous service, her shining integrity, her devoted and compassionate humanity, her gracious and steadfast faith. Grief is the price we pay for love.

Though we acknowledge, in a mostly unspoken way, that death is part of life, it always comes as a shock. The bible teaches that death is always unwelcome, always an intruder. Always God's strange work.

On the night of his arrest, and facing his own imminent death, Jesus is gathered with his disciples. They are frightened and anxious. Jesus comforts them – do not let your hearts be troubled. He offers them two realities upon which to found life and face death. The reality of his purpose and the reality of his person.

His purpose – I go to prepare a place for you in my Father's house.

His person – I am the way and the truth and the life

The comfort of his purpose. I go to prepare a place for you in my Father's house. He is talking about heaven, but he is not only talking about heaven. He uses the most familiar of images to speak of life with God – home.

We know what it is to belong to a place called home. To be welcomed, to be known, to be loved and cared for. This is the way Jesus speaks to us of the unimaginable – life with God, now and forever.

Though she lived her whole life in palaces, Her Late Majesty observed in a documentary made for her Platinum Jubilee:

'We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love and then we return *home*.'

When Jesus says he goes to prepare a place for his disciples he speaks of giving himself to death on a Cross.

Jesus will be abandoned in death, so that his friends will be welcomed into eternal life. He will suffer what our sins deserve so that we may experience the welcome his obedience deserves.

I go to the cross to bring you to heaven. Trust in me.

The late Queen reflected on the unique ministry of Jesus in his life and death in this way, in her Christmas message of 2011:

'Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves – from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person – neither a philosopher nor a general...but a Saviour with the power to forgive. Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith...it is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.'

Here is a reality upon which to found life and disarm death – Jesus has prepared a place in his Father's house, for those who trust in him. It is not a home built by human hands. We do not arrive merely by dying. It takes the death of the Saviour of the world to prepare our place in the Father's house. I go to prepare a place for you – therefore trust in me.

Here is comfort in the face of death – for everyone who trusts in Jesus. We have a home.

Thomas asks the question. Where is this house? How are we going to get there? We don't know where you are going and we don't know the way.

Jesus replies 'I am the way and the truth and the life.' No one comes to the Father except through me.

Because Jesus is the way, we are not lost; because Jesus is the truth we may trust in him; because Jesus is the life, death has lost its sting.

His death is our way, his resurrection is our life. Jesus' rising from the dead shows him to be supremely able in precisely the way that we are disabled. Death is conquered by his death.

In Her Late Majesty's only Easter message, delivered from Windsor Castle at the height of the pandemic in 2020 she said this:

'The discovery of the risen Christ on the first Easter Day gave his followers new hope and fresh purpose.... As dark as death can be — particularly for those suffering with grief — light and life are greater.'

The resurrection proclaims the reality of what is unseen, and invites us to trust the one who is the way and the truth and the life.

Because you know me, Jesus says, you know the Father. I make seen what is unseen.

Here is a reality upon which to found life and disarm death. Jesus – the way the truth and the life, who makes God known.

Jesus speaks comfort to his troubled friends. Trust in God, trust also in me. I go to prepare a place for you and I will bring you there – trust in me. No one comes to the Father but through me – trust in me. I am the way and the truth and the life – trust in me.

In her annual Christmas messages the Late Queen often chose to offer a personal reflection on the life of Jesus.

In 2014 she said, 'For me, the life of Jesus Christ is an inspiration and an anchor in my life' and on another occasion she said, 'it is my prayer that...we may all find room in our lives for the message of the angels and for the love of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

As today we give thanks to God for the long life and gracious reign of our Late Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth, may we be comforted in grief, equipped for life and readied for death, by echoing her prayer and following her example.

Jesus said, do not let your hearts be troubled, trust in God, trust also in me.