

**For everything there is a season**

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, 11, 14; John 14:1-3,6*

On Friday morning, less than 24 hours after the sad announcement of the Queen's death, I was helping at two school assemblies at South Morningside Primary School. Not to have talked about the death would have been wrong, in the view of those of us taking the service. But what to say to Primary School children about death and dying, knowing that for some of them that might have been very difficult. Children by and large cope better with death than teenagers and adults. They are sad, but they move on often more quickly than the rest of us in order that they can get on with life.

I shared my 'lady in blue' story and said that into life happy times and sad times come, and part of living is learning to cope with the help of those around us with all that life brings to us.

What struck me, however, was just before I spoke. The wonderful teacher taking that part of the assembly showed a brief video clip from the children's Newsround programme – that in just a few minutes did a pretty good job in telling the story of a woman who had lived for 96 years. Her not expecting to be Queen; her war-time experience; the sudden death of her own father; her marriage; her children, and some of the difficulties she faced in her own family; her life of duty and service; and her sense of fun and devotion to her country and commonwealth.

Both assemblies, with children aged from seven to eleven, watched enraptured, soaking it all up. At the end of it, there was a moment's unplanned silence. Were there going to be tears, were the children bored, were they indifferent to what they had just seen. No, they applauded. The children of a primary school applauded a woman they had known all their lives. It was almost overwhelming. As all good emotions should be.

We learn from the children – not to shy away from death and not accept its reality – but not to be so overwhelmed by it that the goodness, and the wonder, and the celebration of life, and the reasons to be thankful, that most bereavements bring.

I was reminded of something the Queen said, “We are all visitors to this time, this place. We are just passing through. Our purpose here is to observe, to learn, to grow, to love. And then we return home.”

“For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die...a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn, and a time to dance...”

When death comes close, as it has done to the nation, Commonwealth, and world, in the death of our Queen, it may well for many bring to hearts and minds the other losses we have experienced in our own lives, recently or a long time ago. All those resolved and maybe unresolved issues. Grief dealt with in confidence and thankfulness, or grief still lying near because we have not found the time, or the courage, or the faith, or the honesty, to face it. To say those goodbyes, to forgive those who have died, or ourselves, to let go of those loved ones not to forget them but to let them, and us, rest in peace.

There is no one path through bereavement. It is not a linear process through which we all pass steadily and at the same time. A Swiss psychologist, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, outlined seven stages of grief:

1. shock and disbelief
2. denial
3. guilt
4. anger and bargaining
5. depression, loneliness and reflection
6. reconstruction (or ‘working through’)
7. acceptance

We approach these stages from different angles, and at different times and in different ways. Some we skip over; with others we get stuck. Until, please God, after months, maybe longer, we come to that place in life, that season of life, which is acceptance. Not that we get over the death, but that we become accustomed to it.

Until that time the waves of grief lap at our lives. Often little waves of sadness, sometimes a bigger wave that takes our breath away, or knocks us off our feet. Before, by ourselves, with the help of others, and again, please God, through our faith, we are able to put our feet down once more on solid ground, and dare to stand.

It is what happens to us as individuals, when bereavement comes. It is what is happening to us as a nation today, with many feeling that they have been orphaned all over again. Yet still we stand, even with tears in our eyes, even with heavy hearts, but still we stand, because loved ones are here, and friends are here, and God is here. A God Who knows grief from the inside and who will not let us go. A God Who travels with us through all those seasons of life that the writer of Ecclesiastes spells out. A God Who, in His Son Jesus, talks about what death is, and what death is not. A many-roomed house which our loving Father has prepared for us.

Not what the temperature of the rooms will be, or how big the house, or what the décor will be like, but the place of welcome, the place of rest, the place of reunion where we will meet again with the ones we have loved and lost, the place where, as the Queen said, after we have wept and laughed, mourned and danced, loved and hated, after all that living and dying, "...And then we return home."

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die..."

And after the time of tears, and loss, and bewilderment, maybe the thankfulness, and the hopefulness, and the loving-kindness. "Grief is the price we pay for love", as the Queen said in the aftermath of 9/11, whose anniversary falls today. But after the grief, maybe, like those young children in one of our local primary schools, maybe spontaneous applause, for a life well-lived, the Queen's, and all those other lives near and dear to us, well-lived, which enriched and nurtured and embellished our lives.

It rained for the greater part of last Thursday. At Balmoral, Windsor and Buckingham Palace. And then, for the briefest of moments, over Windsor and London, the rain clouds lift, the sun come out briefly, and a beautiful rainbow shine in the sky. Maybe even in rain drenched Balmoral, far above the clouds, the sun shone and that eternal symbol of God's mercy and love for humanity arched over the heavens, and those with eyes to see, and faith to believe, saw it, and felt it, and knew of the Creator Who still remained, and the Saviour Who still loved; and the Spirit Who still comforted.

"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven..." after these difficult, soul-searching days, and the other older, longer memories that they will stir, God's rainbow love will colour the cold, bleak world, and the time for dancing, and laughing will return. We grieve our Queen's death, we pray for our King's life, and we place our lives, once more, into the unfailing hands of our God, Who will hold us long enough, before setting us upon our feet, so that we may go on.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**