

Raised to life

In the guidance produced for responding to the death of the Duke of Edinburgh, today, the day after the funeral, signals the end of rituals and a return to normality: flags are to return to full mast, books of condolence closed and floral displays ended (which I think is a polite way of saying, *floral tributes removed*). Life must go on.

I was taken by the sounding of *Action Stations* at the end of Prince Philip's funeral. I learnt that he requested it to mark his naval service; and that (I shall have to check this with John when I get to Limpenhoe) it sometimes forms part of a naval funeral. I heard within it a kind of dismissal: a move from lament (the piper) and laying to rest (the Last Post) to getting up (Reveille) and getting on with living; responding, as the Duke did, to the call of life and the call to life.

That's not to say that we should seek to accelerate the process of grieving. 8 days of mourning or 50 minutes of funeral service are not enough for those who grieve most deeply: we have to go at our own pace at such times; and others need to be sensitive to that. But it does signal that we are not made to dwell among the tombs.

I use that phrase because it harks back to an earlier miracle in the gospels: the healing of the Gerasene demoniac, who, in his violently disturbed state, lived among the tombs. Healed by Jesus, he is able to return to his house in the city: a symbol of civilisation, inclusion and community. And this is a theme, particularly, of Luke's Gospel, in which the angels stationed in Jesus' tomb say to the startled women, *Why search among the dead for one who is alive?* And now, as Jesus appears to the Eleven and their companions, he is at pains to emphasise that he is not a ghost. Whatever they understood by that, the place of ghosts is surely among the dead; Jesus is, by contrast, very much alive – and demonstrates it by, rather pointedly, eating a piece of fish. Indeed, Jesus is, as Peter says in Luke's Acts of the Apostles, the *Author of life* – the one who leads us into life.

The physical aspect of Jesus' resurrected body, emphasised in Luke, is a sign that ours is not a faith in which the physical does not matter – something to be escaped from, left behind when we die. The life that Jesus leads us into is a physical life – not just an ethereal concept beyond the grave. In our reading from Acts, proclamation of the resurrection accompanies a physical healing in Jesus' name: the restoration of a crippled man. And in both readings the resurrection acts as a call to repentance and forgiveness: the restoration, in this life, of a right relationship with God and freedom from the mistakes of the past. Jesus' charge to the Eleven and his other witnesses is that they are to proclaim that throughout the world: those who follow Jesus are called to lead others to life. Christian faith is not a private insurance policy.

The Coronavirus pandemic has prompted most of us to re-evaluate our lives and many people have decided upon a change of direction or pace. My observation is that there is a noticeable increase in people stepping down – often from roles they have held for some time. That's ok: people need to be free to do that; sometimes it's in order to take up something else. But it does mean that, as we emerge from this phase of the pandemic, there needs to be an accompanying call to arms: a sounding of *Action Stations* for others to step up to the plate. Not that others will necessarily feel called to the vacated roles. The pandemic has taught us that some things are not as essential as we once thought they were; and that maybe it's time for some things to die. But as Christians, we shouldn't fear death: as with yesterday's funeral we need to be prepared to lay such things to rest; and then get on with living: in the name and power of the *Author of life*, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

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