

'In Memory of Her'- What will we be remembered for?

Sandy Parish Church Revd Huw Davies June 21st 2020

Thank you for joining me today as we take up the topic of remembrance - how will you / we be remembered, what legacy will we leave behind?

I have a memory of being a young child and going out into a graveyard to play. Seeing there were lots of flowers on some graves whilst others had none, I simply took up some of the flowers and distributed them around the graves. I was told off by a very severe church warden! I think it was from that point I have always had a bit of a fascination of churchyards and in particular the inscriptions on people's graves.

There is a story of a Yorkshireman who was burying his wife. He asked the stonemason to engrave on the headstone the words: '*Mary Brown, Yorkshire Lass, LORD she was Thine*' The headstone came from the masons and on it was the inscription 'Lord, she was thin' "That's no good, you've left off the 'e'" Mr Brown said to the mason. He took it away and returned it a week later, it now read "Mary Brown Yorkshire Lass E' Lord she was Thin"

Statues can also act as memorials and there are some beautiful statues around our country: This one in Maidenhead (pictured) is of Sir Nicholas Winton who saved the lives of 669 Jewish children from the Nazis by organising the Czech Kindertransport just prior to WW2.

This one in Morpeth Northumbria (pictured) is of Emily Wilder-Davidson - Suffragette who gave her life for the cause of women's rights and the right for women to have the vote. She died in June 1913 under the hooves of the King's horse on Derby Day in Epsom.

The window in north transept of our church tells the story of Jesus being anointed: '*A few days before his arrest whilst Jesus was in Bethany in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.*

When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "*Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. Truly I tell you, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.*" *Matthew 26: 6-13 & Mark 14: 9*

This simple act of kindness. Perhaps she had seen in Jesus a deep sense of foreboding as he knew what was to come, perhaps she had listened to his words as he spoken to the disciples a few days before about his coming arrest, torture and crucifixion. Knowing that his time was to shortly come, she took a jar of very expensive perfume, perhaps the most valuable thing she owned, and poured it over him, anointing his head, his hands and feet in preparation for burial.

"Jesus said she had done "a beautiful thing". She took what she had and did what she could and Jesus calls us to do the same, to do what we can, because this is the Gospel. What a strange and amazing thing that Jesus should highlight this simple act which this woman did as an example to us and said would be told throughout history and all over the world, everywhere that the gospel is preached this woman and this act will be remembered! Amazing!

We are not given her name but are told that a woman with a simple act of kindness recognised and worshipped Christ the Saviour. Those present at the time and the disciples criticised her for this act of kindness declaring that it was wasteful and saying that she could have made better use of her money, giving it to the poor.

Jesus says reminds them that they have the poor around them every day and with that continuous opportunities to help. He tells them to “leave her alone”, in other words, to stop criticising her. Today she had done this kindness - any kindness is to be commended.

What a challenge to me, to us - to do what I can while I can and not pick holes in other people who are doing acts of charity simply because I arrogantly suppose I can think of a better way that they might have done it , or of something more important.

All over this church there are memorials that tell us something about kindnesses done. This window behind me (south chancel wall) is dedicated by Revd John Richardson who rebuilt this building, he came here as the new Rector in 1858 and found the church in a state of dilapidation and within three years rebuilt the whole church, leaving us with the beautiful building we have today.

Now in the last six months we have been repairing the walls, the roof and the tower, and as we finish the outside, the challenge will be to get the inside ready for the next hundred years.

In these last three months we have seen huge changes in our nation, things that you could not have predicted. This church needs to be ready for the generations that will follow us. This building has served us well and now we must make sure that it serves the generations to come.

I thank God for the legacies that have been left, and those that will be left in years to come. So that we can not only restore the building but we can keep the faith, the Gospel alive in Sandy.

The lovely window behind me is dedicated by the Rector John Richardson to his wife Ellen. She was only 32 when she died in childbirth on 11th July 1860 leaving 3 children. It depicts the story Jesus told which we often refer to as The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats.

In Matthew chapter 25 Jesus says:

For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’
“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’

Jesus replies ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

What a lovely thing for John Richardson to say about his wife -- ‘Let me tell you, she was a wonderful woman, she cared, for the sick, for the poor, she had a heart for the lost and the least and the broken.’ That is a wonderful thing to be remembered for.

Just across the way in the north transept there is an epitaph to Francis Pym who died in 2008. He served his country faithfully and was a man of courage and integrity. He was a Member of Parliament, the Privy Council, Home Secretary and Northern Ireland Secretary. He was much loved by many people and respected by politicians of all parties.

On the chancel north wall is one to Samuel Ongley of Sandy Place; died in 1802 aged 47. *“He was a kind and affectionate husband, brother and friend and possessed a heart ever open to the distresses of his fellow creatures. In the circle in which he lived he was loved and respected. His death has been equally mourned and lamented. Those only who lived in friendship with him knew his worth. His afflicted widow has erected this simple tablet in memory of his virtues and his irreparable loss.”*

And what of his wife, Mrs Frances Ongley? There is another plaque that has been raised to her it hangs in the Tower Room. She lived on for another twenty years until she was 72. They write of her:

“Her charities were extensive, and her benevolent disposition never failed to give comfort and relief to the needy. “They that give to the poor, lend to the LORD.” Proverbs 19:17

I asked the question at the beginning: ‘What will we be remembered for? And who will remember us?’

I want to finish with this - There are both things of comfort and challenge in what I am saying this morning to myself and perhaps to you.

Some days you may feel that no-one will remember you. Who cares? Who loves you? To whom do you matter? How much are you worth and to whom?

Let me share this passage from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah with you. The prophet asked the question:

*“Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!
See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; (Isaiah chapter 49:15-16)*

It has become a trend in recent years for people to engrave the names of their children on their body, their arm, shoulder, neck or chest, to say I will never forget you.....I will remember you. This idea was God’s 2,800 years before this current trend. The passage in Isaiah speaks of how God has engraved us on the palm of His hands.

On the cross the nails went through the palm of his hands and figuratively Jesus says, I will never forget you, my blood covers you. It is as if he says ‘I have not forgotten you, I have not abandoned you, I love you and you are mine.

Just a few chapters earlier the prophet Isaiah writes this: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says ‘He who created you and formed you: “Do not fear for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name and you are mine. When you pass through the waters I will be with you, and when you pass through the rivers they will not sweep over you.

When you walk through the fire you will not be burned. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, Your Saviour.” Isaiah 43: 1-3

Who will remember you? Jesus remembers you. He will never forget you or neglect you. He remembers you with kindness, with compassion with love.

When we let His love touch us deeply we will do what that woman did when she came with the alabaster pot, took the most precious thing she owned and poured it out with love as an act of worship.

May God bless you and give you the gift of his Peace and His Presence in your present situation and may you sense Him with you as you walk, whether today’s walk is through the raging flood waters or in the sunshine.

Revd Huw Davies 21/6/20