

Dear friends,

I, along with many millions around the world, watched the funeral of HRH Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, and was really moved by the event. The restrictions that so many bereaved families have endured over the last year or so are still in place, and a royal funeral was no exception. Limited guests in St George's chapel seated at a distance in households; no congregational singing; and no real opportunity afterwards to smile, grieve and share memories amongst family and friends. Those who have been bereaved during this time would especially be able to empathise with Her Majesty the Queen and her family.

The service clearly reflected the Duke's wishes. Along with all the pomp and circumstance that was still possible and appropriate for a senior member of the royal family, it was lovely to see more personal touches especially the Duke's carriage pulled by his two favourite horses and in his empty seat were his rug, cap, gloves and plastic tupperware containing horse treats (sugar cubes).

I thought the music chosen by the Duke for the funeral service itself was beautiful, especially the setting of Psalm 104 arranged by composer William Lovelady. A little research told me that it was originally composed for the Duke's 75th birthday celebrations and two of the singers last weekend were representing the commonwealth (Australia and New Zealand).

I was also interested to hear a reading from Ecclesiasticus - not to be confused with Ecclesiastes! - that was also a favourite of the Duke's and read at his 90th birthday service. Ecclesiasticus (sometimes also called Sirach or Ben Sira) is a book in the apocrypha - a group of books and writings that are additional to the books of the Old Testament. Some Bibles (like mine) will have them in a middle section between the Old and New Testament. I remember the apocryphal books of 1 and 2 Maccabees as texts that featured quite heavily in part of my A level Religious Studies syllabus, all those years ago! The reading we heard last Saturday was a beautiful passage about the wonder and order of creation. The Duke's love of and care for the natural world was very much reflected in the verses we heard. It feels fitting to read some again below from chapter 43 especially as we are in the season of Easter and the glorious spring weather of the last few days reminds us that new life is all around us:

'Look at the rainbow, and praise him who made it; it is exceedingly beautiful in its brightness. It encircles the sky with its glorious arc; the hands of the Most High have stretched it out.

In his majesty he gives the clouds their strength, the voice of his thunder rebukes the earth; when he appears the mountains shake.

At his will the south wind blows; so do the storm from the north and the whirlwind.

He consumes the mountains and burns up the wilderness, and withers the tender grass like fire. A mist quickly heals all things; the falling dew gives refreshment from the heat.

By his plan he stilled the deep and planted islands in it. In it are strange and marvellous creatures, all kind of living things, and huge sea monsters.

We could say more but could never say enough; let the final word be: 'He is the all'

Where can we find the strength to praise him? For he is greater than all his works.

Awesome is the Lord and very great, and marvellous, is his power.

We continue to remember Rita in our prayers this week. Lastly, a bit of advance notice that morning worship on the 9th May when Rev Andrew de Ville, Chair of District, will be leading our Church Anniversary service will also include a love feast. The love feast cake recipe will be sent out again via Judith for those who might like to bake in preparation for that service. I'm taking a break next week with John - another staycation!

Stay safe and well everyone,

Claire