

Lord God. Sustain us in the veil of tears, with the vision of your grace, and glory. In Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Much has been written, and said, about the Duke of Edinburgh in the past week: his story; his contribution; his style. This evening I would like to focus on his distinguished and committed public service: to the Queen; the commonwealth; this nation; and, indeed, to the planet. It seems to me to have operated at two levels. First, the evident, and significant, engagement with charities; with conservation; and, of course, the invention of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, 65 years old this year.

His inquiring mind, allied to a desire to make a difference, ensured that lives benefited from this all over the world.

Public service means that you put concern for others at the top of the agenda of your life.

This is the purposeful life: 'love your neighbour' gives shape, and meaning, to our existence.

When we die, it is what we have done for others that will be remembered.

Over the last year the words kindness and compassion have gained currency as communities have sought to reach out to each other, and healthy societies are built on this.

But the second angle, on the Duke of Edinburgh's public service, is that much of the time it involved turning up; being there; and not as the main attraction.

The being present to people has a value all of its own. It is affirming to communities, and people tell the stories for generations, of being somewhere where the Queen and Prince Philip turned up. The royal Maundy service that took place in this cathedral in 1997 is still regularly referenced by people in this city. Goodness lingers in the memory as a stimulus for our own response.

And you can see the impact of this kind of presence ministry, not just in the Queen and Prince Philip - supremely I suppose with them - but also in the Lord Lieutenants; in the Lord Mayors; in civic leaders; and others. Being present values others and it affirms social goodness. So today we give thanks for the Duke of Edinburgh's long life and for his international contribution, but we also pray today for the Queen and the Royal Family. Grief is born out of love and the Royal Family need our prayers at this time of loss. The death of Prince Philip adds to the weight of sorrow, that families up and down this land have experienced in the past year, and as we watch the funeral tomorrow, many will feel their own grief welling up.

Death has come close to us as a society, in a way that most of us will never have experienced before, and the readings in this service offer us some wisdom for this moment.

The psalmist names it: 'I will lift up mine eyes into the hills from whence cometh my help'.

Bereavement is undoubtedly helped by the sharing of stories, and memories. The presence of supportive family and friends, and the gift of tears.

But it also raises big questions about our own lives, and our mortality. The psalmist's thoughts go beyond the scenic views of the hills, to the maker of the universe; the keeper of my life.

Here is a living, and personal, and abundant, help, based on promise after promise: from this time forth forever more.

The poem is about being held by God.

The prophet Isaiah underlines the purposeful life, which is always outward looking. The oppressed, the broken-hearted, the captives, those who mourn, are the focus; and Isaiah speaks of a life given to building up, and repairing.

And in the Gospel, Jesus speaks to the perplexed and invites attachment: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life'.

Whatever life throws at us there is one who can be our wise guide, and his life is Easter in us.

Here in these readings is the language of stability, of service, and hope, based on compassion and kindness, and it is the gift of the one who lives forever more, and who invites each one of us to share in that life into eternity. Amen.