

You will have noticed from the readings, and the words that have been sung, that at the heart of the Christian faith is a resolute earthiness; no vague spirituality that sometimes we try to reduce it to. But in our Old Testament reading from Lamentations on page four of your order of service, grief and love are held together as the Queen herself has said, in relation to her husband, that where there is love there will be grief, and grief is inextricably linked with love.

That's why today we pray particularly for the Queen, and for her family, as they mourn, because the Duke of Edinburgh was first a husband, and a father, and a grandfather, and a great-grandfather, and the rest flowed from that.

If you turn to the reading from Revelation, you'll see that this is reinforced, because when in this final book of the Christian Bible, John has this vision. He saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. What a depressing thought for someone like me who comes from the coast, from Liverpool. There's no sea?

But the point is that it refers to the sea always represented turbulence, disturbance, upset, confusion; and what it's saying is that there will be none of that when finally peace is brought.

But it goes on to say 'I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God'. Many people talk about death, and what follows, as us going to be with God, when this says that, in fact, God comes to us. And that is the heart of the Christian faith, that God takes the initiative. When we think we have found him, we discover that He's already found us. The initiative is with God.

This is an earthed faith. And this is what we see in the faith of the Duke of Edinburgh.

A lot has been said over the last couple of days, in wall-to-wall television and radio, and lots of personal reflections by people, of their own experiences of him; of the charities that he has supported; the legacy that he leaves behind us; and it's not my job to repeat any of that. But I want to say two things to draw attention to two elements of his life and his legacy, and I have to say I find it hard not to smile when saying this, because my own encounters with the Duke were always very robust - I think that's the word - but always very funny.

I was asked on a radio station this morning about a particular encounter and I was told - it was Radio York if you want to go searching for it - I was told yeah in Yorkshire we're used to this; we call a spade a spade. Now don't throw stones at me when I say what I responded with, which was 'but in Yorkshire we're better at giving it than we are at taking it. We like to call a spade a spade. It's harder when someone does it to us'. And yet my experience of the Duke of Edinburgh was he could not only give it, but he could take it.

I probably shouldn't tell you any anecdotes or flesh any of that out, but if you persuade me afterwards I might just tell you one or two bits! But I'll tell you this - he didn't like the Guardian!

But there were two initiatives that I think speak loudly about him, and his commitments. One was the founding of St George's House in Windsor, which if you watched the Netflix series 'The Crown', it was one of the bits they got right. I know they keep saying 'The Crown' is fiction but it's quite difficult sometimes to distinguish the fiction from the reality.

But he was persuaded to put time, money, and space, into the creation of St George's House because the Duke recognised that what human beings need to do in a fragile society, and a mortal world, is come together, first for encounter and hospitality, and only then to go on to begin to discuss some of the difficult issues, and so he created the space at St George's House in Windsor - where some of us here today have been many times - as a place where you could meet people who are not like you. Initially it was people of faith having to engage with people of science, because of some of the myths that were around - what they call the conflict myth - about science and faith, and the Duke was convinced that faith was only of value when it was earthed; when it connected with the real world, the decisions that we have to make, the dilemmas we face, and you couldn't simply shunt it off into a compartment where it didn't connect. It's not worth believing in if you have to keep it separate from real, lived experience, in the world.

We're back to Revelation and that incarnational element of faith.

So people would come to listen, and to learn, and to realise that faith, and everything else, had to be rooted in reality, and that means facing complexity, and not trying to reduce it, not a simplicity, but to becoming simplistic.

The second thing, was the creation of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, in which he spotted, but didn't only think about but did something about, how young people, then in a world rebuilding from the Second World War, needed to have aspirations raised when opportunities were sometimes slim. How I wish, that when I had been a kid at a school in Liverpool where aspiration was very low - where it was expected that, you know, get a job and it might be okay - this is the 1970s in Liverpool, remember that?; bad days - and yet the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards were actually set up for people like me - I never knew about them until I was an adult - where young people could have their aspirations expanded; their ambitions deepened; where they could learn about leadership and teamwork - again rooted in what I was saying about St George's House - rooted in meeting; encounter with other people; playing as a team with other people; facing the complexities and the challenges of the world with each other, whether we agree with each other, like each other or not, that is not the point. But we see the strength in listening and learning; in having our imaginations, and our ambitions stretched, and the testimony of so many young people who have done the Duke of Edinburgh's Awards, will say straight off, that it was this stretch that has been of infinite value to them.

Prince Philip, as is being seen from all the eulogies and the tributes, was an honest man: he didn't hide behind bluff. Any of you who had an argument with him will know that. He was brave. I did like the clip I saw on twitter where he was being interviewed, I think, by Wogan, some years ago, and he said that he'd been present at the Japanese surrender at the end of the war. When he went back to Japan years later with the Queen for a state visit, and the

Prime Minister, I think it was, had said to him “so your Royal Highness, this is your first visit to Japan?” He said ‘yes’, and he followed it up with “I wasn't always tactless!”. I thought was a great response.

But he was straight; you knew where you were with him. Bishops like me who went to spend a weekend at Sandringham, were told beforehand: “Don't just agree; take him on”. Because it's in the robust encounter, in the argument, in the being honest and pushing, that he found the stimulus; the stimulation that it's worth doing. And in that context, not only was he sharp, and straight, and honest, and brave, but he was very funny.

We are confronted today not only by his death, but by the reminder of our own mortality from which we often try to run. But at the heart of this service, agreed to by her majesty the Queen and commended for use today, we see that mortality is the beginning and not the end of the story. We shall die, but death does not have the last word.

And it's in the words that will be spoken - they were at the beginning of our service and will be said at the committal of his body at the funeral next Saturday – ‘he has lived and died, in sure and certain hope, of the resurrection from the dead’. it's in that light, that we pray for her majesty the Queen; for the royal family; for this nation; for one another; for the Commonwealth; and the wider world.

May he rest in peace, and rise in glory. Amen.