

Funeral Sermon for Jackie Stokes 22nd July 2020

It is a huge privilege for St Margaret's to be the venue for the funeral of Jackie because Jackie was so much part of our family here. She was a much loved and treasured member of our congregation over many years and we were fearful that the lockdown would be very hard for her as she was such an active person. She would not have enjoyed being confined to home.

As we have heard from Jenny's wonderful eulogy, Jackie led an extraordinary full life. She travelled widely and served people through out her life in so many ways and in so many contexts. Her faith was fully integrated into her whole life and as such drew attention away from herself and always towards the flourishing of the other.

Jackie was very quietly spoken which meant that when she contributed to a bible study or an Iona prayer meeting you were wise to listen carefully, for her insights were deeply rooted, thought through and profoundly wise. Jackie was someone through whom God's immeasurable grace flowed freely and we were all so lucky to be on the receiving end of her wisdom and discernment. We are going to miss Jackie hugely.

So though it is right that our thoughts and memories rest in the past; we also meet in the present, here today, giving due deference to the reality that we gather as family and friends marking Jackie's return to the loving embrace of God. This is the true purpose of this service, to come together and celebrate Jackie's life, to share our memories, to mourn our loss, to say our final goodbyes and to thank God for all that Jackie means to us.

But finally we also meet looking to the future, to the Christian hope that death is not the end, but a new beginning with our belief that Jackie is now enfolded in the loving arms of the God who loves her and each one of us; to the Christian hope revealed in the knowledge that though Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross, he then rose again on the third day; the Christian hope that as Christians we believe that we will all be reunited at the final resurrection of the dead.

The Christian faith does not hide from suffering and death; rather it meets it face to face. It does not deny its existence, but rather reveals a God who profoundly understands, who has experienced joy, celebration, pain, suffering and death. This is not a cerebral, intellectual understanding lacking in empathy. Quite the opposite; God's understanding is complete because he also experienced pain, suffering and death in human form on the cross.

This is what we celebrate at Easter and is celebrated and remembered in the Eucharist, that Jesus not only overcame death on the cross, but through his resurrection he is alive and with us forever, in our earthly lives and after our deaths.

In the loneliness of grief and mourning that message of hope can feel a long way away. Yet it is there and remains for us. God is always reaching out to us in love. It applies to those who have gone before us, it applies to Jackie, it applies to us now and it applies to everyone in the future.

So may God who loves you all beyond measure and who is along side you in your grief, bless you all this day and surround you always with his unending and limitless love.

Amen.