

**All things new**

*Jeremiah 8:18 – 9:1 Revelation 21:1-7*

This last week for many has been coming to terms with the fact that she is gone. Like any bereavement when it occurs, the gap between the death of Her Late Majesty, and the state funeral that will take place tomorrow morning, leaves us in a bewildering no-mans-land.

There was that incredible filmed journey of the Queen from Balmoral to Edinburgh last week, where our local undertakers Purves drove the cortege down from the gates of Balmoral, through rural, small town and urban Scotland, almost a metaphor for grief transitioning from disbelief to reality.

There were the wonderful events at Holyroodhouse and St Giles, simple, dignified, surprisingly intimate, where through word, song and silence the processing of loss was begun for many, and people found themselves in many different ways caught out by the impact of the Queen's death on their own lives. That image of the RAF plane leaving Turnhouse with our Queen, taking her from Scotland for the last time, was incredibly powerful.

Then Her arrival in a rainy, grey London, and the events through the streets moving Her coffin from Buckingham Palace to Westminster Hall. And of course, tomorrow the state funeral at Westminster Abbey, and the journey to Windsor Castle, and the final laying to rest in St George's Chapel, beside Her husband, and not far from Her parents.

It has been an emotional time for many of us, and there is no shame in sharing that tears have never been far away as we have witnessed the end of an era and the death of someone we respected and who was a part of all of our lives in one way or another. Tears may sometimes feel embarrassing, particularly for the British, but they are surely a healthy release of the toxin of death

and sadness that we all feel at times of death and loss. Here is a safe place to cry, as we sing our hymns, and pray our prayers, and as we look again at the beautiful flowers beside our communion table.

Jeremiah, sometimes labelled, 'the weeping prophet', asks, "Is there no balm in Gilead", no comfort for grieving hurting people whose tears are as real as the hurt and fear and loss his people in ancient Israel felt in their hard day. "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved...O that my head were a spring of water, and my eyes a fountain of tears, so that I might weep day and night..."

In the book of Revelation, there is a reference to tears too. At some future time, when the world is renewed and all is changed by the love and mercy and kindness of our God, God will be seen to live with the children of earth, and this loving, tender God, "will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more..."

After the time of pain, suffering, grief and sadness, after the time of tears, God promises to get alongside us and to wipe away the tears from our eyes. Not demeaning or diminishing our loss or our grief, but showing at that time God cares and will call us gently to begin the process of moving on.

But what if we are not ready? What if we are finding it hard to let go? What if we have cloaked ourselves in sadness, like a dark cloud, and cannot accept that it is time to move on? You might think of images of Queen Victoria after the death of Prince Albert. The Widow of Windsor, shutting herself away from the world in her grief and loss. The film Mrs Brown, with Judi Dench and Billy Connolly captured that time of grief and tension and transition. How unlike our own late Queen who, grieving Prince Philip, steeled herself to face the world and led our country through Covid and her Platinum jubilee in the remaining months of her life. Still missing her loved one, but ready,

with faith, with help, with support, to make the transition, to move on, and to accept that all things new would continue to come into life.

In this time of looking back there is already a time of looking forward. For some it is natural, for others it is unsettling. In our country we spend so much time engaging with nostalgia.

What will be the legacy of Queen Elizabeth? What kind of King will Charles be? What will the new Government under Liz Truss be like? What kind of country might we become in a new era. We fear that in a world where everything feels it has changed, nothing may have changed. The war in Ukraine and its horrors still rolls on. The economic crisis facing our country is still there. Fuel poverty steps closer. The Foodbank we will be supporting next week was inundated on Thursday. There was plenty stock but the shelves in the 'back shop' were probably 70% empty when the last client left. A lot of referrals came from local schools, a sign of things to come.

Is there balm in Gilead? Will tears be wiped away by our gentle God. What of God's promise of making all things new? Can we look forward to it? Could we bear it?

After lockdown many wanted things to settle into the 'new normal', though maybe more would have been quite happy with the 'old normal' for a while. But time cannot be rolled back. "The world is changed. I feel it in the water. I feel it in the earth. I smell it in the air. Much that once was is lost..."<sup>i</sup> We are confronted with, challenged by what God moves us towards in a world that constantly renews, however wistfully we might look back at what once was.

God's vision is bigger than our timescale. God deals in eternity. Whilst God steps into our time to be with us, God calls us onwards, even if we are fearful, uncertain, even resistant.

After tomorrow's state funeral, before we descend into the grubby world of politics and economics and all that seems bleak and frightening, might we make a pledge to ourselves, and our God, to try to hold on to at least some of the good that has come out of this time of mourning

and loss? Those qualities and traits of doing duty, loyalty over the years, faithfulness in the face of adversity, that were espoused by Her Late Majesty might still continue through us in our world today.

"If we have hope we have optimism. If we have optimism, we have the courage and compassion to embrace difference and diversity. If we have courage, we have the ability..."<sup>ii</sup> And if we have hope, optimism, courage, compassion, and ability, might we also have intention and agency? That what we value and aspire towards might be what we become and put into practice.

There *is* balm in Gilead, and tears *will* be wiped away, if we let it and work towards it.

In Revelation we have a vision of all things becoming new. A holy city comes down from heaven from God, a vision of the Church, a world at the end of time, which we work towards today. God's home set amongst humanity, God dwelling with God's people.

Speaking to one of our senior elders a few days ago we both wondered why everything at the moment seems to be so difficult and hard. Maybe it's the dregs of lockdown living, maybe we're all getting older, but life does seem heavier. Maybe unnecessarily so, if we believe there *is* Balm in Gilead; if we believe tears *will* be wiped from every eye; if we believe we *are* headed forward to the newness of God, with God.

That is our destiny. That is the purpose of history. That is our hope, when skies are dark, when hearts are heavy, when tears are in our eyes. God wipes away the tears, extends His hand to us, and lifts us up. And we, eventually, go on.

**In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit**

**Amen**

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<sup>i</sup> J R R Tolkien, Lord of the Rings

<sup>ii</sup> Lord Cashman, Twitter