

Roger

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

That is the greeting that Roger heard every Sunday when he came to this place.

The Lord be with you.

And Roger, like all those around him would say, and also with you.

This is the place I met Roger for the first time when I came here as a parishioner almost 20 years ago. It is where I came to know him as a fellow Christian and a dear dear friend. It is where I worked with him first as a priest in charge and then as a rector. For those of us who have been in leadership positions and have worked with Roger we would know what an extraordinary team member he was and how critical he was to every thing that happened in this place. We could all tell story after story of his conscientiousness, his commitment, his following through, even when he became frustrated at times. We could all tell stories of his love and care that shone through his 'gruffness'. As we have heard he was a person of substance, a great protector and man who knew what service was and gave of himself. On a very personal note the home that he created with Chris became a safe haven for me where I could be completely myself, feel completely loved and always welcomed. It is a gift I will never forget.

So I speak as a friend of Roger but I also speak as a priest and a follower of the way of Jesus the Christ. It is my job today to put the life of our dear Roger into the context of that way and to point us to something beyond endings. The way in is through this colour that I am wearing, purple. Perhaps you can see it in various places in the church.

Purple is the colour of advent, the time just before Christmas. It is the church colour we use when we know something extraordinary is about to be celebrated and remembered. We use this colour in lent for example, which is the lead up to Easter, the remembrance of the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We use this colour now in the lead up to Christmas when we remember the birth of Jesus. It is the colour of prayer and turning once more to the centre of our life and our creation, God. It is a fitting colour today as we sit with the reality of death and life and how the two are ever one and connected. As the poem from TS Elliot says, in our end is our beginning. This is the time to turn to God or at the very least to turn to what God is, love.

But this is more than a warm fuzzy sentiment. This love that is God and God that is love, is something more powerful than death, more present than your very breath, more intimate than your deepest feeling or thought, more compassionate than your most tender moment. This love is never about coercive power or control, it is only ever about allowing and freedom. It is something that in our human knowing we touch fleetingly and with great longing but it calls all seekers of truth and goodness. We grasp it dimly and through a mirror darkly but we know it is there and as we follow it, its light begins to lead us. In all cultures, in and through all faiths, in belief or no belief, it calls, it calls us home.

Those first followers of Jesus sensed that light and they began to follow him around. We pick up the story in John's Gospel where Jesus has just fed a crowd of thousands and escaped to a mountain top. He heads for the hills because he knows that they want to make him a king, a leader who will take over the land and install their rule. This is not the God of Jesus and he will have no part in it.

So with Jesus off and away somewhere, his closest followers get into a boat on the lake. It is dark and the wind comes up. The water has become rough and the boat unsteady. In my mind's eye I imagine the wind howling, the disciples hanging on, and the large waves looming around them. They keep hanging on and rowing. Heads down I imagine and heading towards shore. Then they see Jesus walking on water and they are even more terrified. He says those words that for me are the very heart of the gospel, that good news that he brings.

He says, *'it is I, do not be afraid'*.

Actually, he says in the original Greek of the gospel, *I am, do not be afraid.*

It is not just a statement about who he is, that is, 'don't worry, it's just me'.

It is a statement that says,

I am,

I am here,

I am always here,

I will always be here.

Do not be afraid.

It is a statement about eternal, ever present being, ever present love. It is also a statement that gets him into serious trouble with the authorities of the time. For when Jesus says those words he doesn't just give words of reassurance. He commits what amounts to blasphemy. For those that knew their Scriptures and their traditions he was basically saying he was God, or as close to being God as you could get. In the religious tradition of Jesus own Jewish community, in one of Moses first encounters with God, God's own description of Gods self is, *I am that I am.*

Nothing more. Nothing less. Pure being.

You know, I don't know scientifically how Jesus walked on water. I don't know if he even really did. It doesn't actually matter, or at least I don't think it actually matters. A story does not have to be factually true in all aspects for it to reveal an eternal truth. The disciples saw in Jesus the most important thing one can know about God, that God is, that God is love, that God is light in whom there is no darkness at all.

The disciples followed the light of Jesus on highways and byways, up and down mountains, around tables drinking and eating and talking and healing those in need and revealing God's love. They followed him to the pain and agony and loss of the cross, where they gave up and ran away. They were found again by him when he appeared to them, after the darkness, mystery and wonder of the resurrection. By then they knew not just light, but eternal love and forgiveness. They knew both purpose and peace.

They had learnt to not be afraid even when things were the most bleak and dark, even when they were the most filled with fear and grief and loss. They had learnt the gift of eternal peace, the peace that passes all understanding, the peace that comes to us when we turn and rest in the ever present being of God.

There is no trick to this. There is no secret. There is nothing holy about it. All we have to do is breathe deeply into our own being, let go of all our assumptions and ideas and thoughts and caveats and questions and turmoil and worry and be here, in being, in this moment and we are home with God. In our end is our beginning. In the ever present now, everything is. In this moment is eternity. When the seeker stops, looks and sees, the truth will find them. And nothing is ever lost and no one is ever truly gone.

Roger is still with us. He is there with love for his parents and those who made him the man he was. He is there with enduring gratitude for Kathryn, the mother of his children. He is there with love for Andrew, David, Eleanor and Olivia and their families. He is there with his friends in shared memories and deep connection. He is here in and through this church, probably still complaining about that bloody tree in the court yard, but still lifting his voice in prayer and praise. He is there with Chris, hoping for the very best for him, wanting him to be safe and well, loving him.

I know that because that was Roger and that was what he shared with me.

I know that because in life and in death, in our beginning and our end, and everything in between, God is, and in God we are all one, now and always.

The Lord be with you

And also with you.

Amen