

We have come here this afternoon for the funeral of Ethel Morrison. Her sister Anne has shared with us her memories of Ethel as sister, of the family's pride in her many achievements in the field of nursing and her zest for life. She grew up in a loving and supportive family. That was a love that was freely and generously returned in the care she would give to her parents, to her uncle, to her brother. It is lovely to hear of the family's love for her, a love that spanned the generations, of her brothers and sisters, their families and grandchildren.

Her faith was clearly important to her. This was a living faith, not just brought out and dusted down for Sundays; this was clearly a faith lived out in worship, in life, in service to others. She loved the life and fellowship of this place, regular not just in her Sunday worship but also in midweek activity through the PWA and Oasis.

On an occasion such as this I often find myself searching for a verse of scripture that draws my thoughts together. I found myself turning to the First Letter to Timothy. The Apostle gives his advice to the younger man:

But as for you, man of God, pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith; take hold of the eternal life, to which you were called and for which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. *1 Tim 6:11 ff*

‘pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.’ This seems to me to draw together so many of the memories of the Ethel Morrison that I was never privileged to know, that I know so many of you remember

today with love and affection. Ethel fought the good fight, in her life if service as a nurse, in the love she shared with family and in the whole way in which she dealt with declining health.

We come here to give thanks for Ethel. We come to remember in our prayers those who will miss her most. We think particularly of Ethel's sisters and brother, Anne, Andrew and Dorothy; their children and their grandchildren. However strong our faith, there is still a finality to the death of a loved one, who company, love, wisdom and all that made Ethel the person she was to us. There is a gap there that no-one else can fill in quite the same way. May you draw comfort and inspiration from Ethel's faith, the way that faith clearly inspired her whole life. May you know God's presence and peace as you remember Ethel.

We come to set the mystery of death in the context of our Christian faith. I love the summary of that that we find in the opening chapter of St John's Gospel:-

⁴What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

Darkness has not had the last word in the life of Ethel Morrison. Sickness, weakness has not had the final say. In fellowship with John, we follow a Lord who knows what death, what suffering, what loss is all about; one who knew what it was like to weep at the grave of his friend Lazarus. Not only that, he is

the one who was raised triumphant over death, breaking the power of death itself. Knowing in his own person what it was all about, I find in him one to whom I can come in my own time of suffering and find real comfort, real strength and real hope.

We read as one of our lessons a passage from St Paul's second letter to the Church at Corinth. the end of chapter 4 and the beginning of chapter 5. In this Paul presents us with the reality of our own mortality and death, he talks very plainly of the body wearing out. But just as he talks of the reality of physical decline and death, Paul talks of our new heavenly home. The words that really stand out for me are; "So that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." This is our hope for Ethel Morrison, that all the limitations of these latter years, the frailty, along with all the limitations that go with being human are "swallowed up by life", that is our inheritance in Christ in the closer presence of our heavenly Father. This is our hope for our sister Ethel. May that be our hope in the days to come.