

Last Thursday morning Audrey Dickson was at her exercise class. It was the last of the season and at the end Audrey got up to thank the teacher on behalf of the class for keeping them all well. From there she went to join friends on Sutton beach for a swim. It is there that she was suddenly taken ill and she died in the early hours of Friday morning in Beaumont Hospital. As the family said in the death notice Audrey died ‘doing what she did best, living life to the full, with friends and family.’

Her death, and the sudden and unexpected nature of her death, has left her family and her friends and the wider community shocked and shattered. This is a measure of how widely loved and cherished this gentle and generous woman was esteemed.

The daughter of a Naval Architect, she had lived in Scotland and England before coming to Ireland on marriage. Here she reared her four sons, David, Alan, Gary and Ian. Life was not always easy for her and in those times she found a spiritual home for herself and her family here in Howth Presbyterian Church. On marriage to her beloved Cecil, she joined the Parish of Howth. With St Mary’s Church closed for renovations, it is fitting that her funeral is held here and the family are grateful to the congregation of Howth Presbyterian Church for making this place available.

We all come here with our own particular memories of Audrey. The family have already shared their own particular memories. We remember a lady who threw herself into the life of her family, her Church and her community. She brought a down to earth, practical, common sense approach to things which meant she was very effective on committees and several people have remarked how effective she was in the chair at meetings. She brought not just her practicality, she brought her humanity. In my early days here she was on Select Vestry. I remember at one stage, there had been some difficulties, I

picked up the phone in the office and it was Audrey. ‘How are you? I just sense this is a difficult time for you.’ We chatted for a while and I put down the phone feeling more at peace. And I would suspect that many of you can recall similar experiences.

I spoke of her humanity that was expressed in a care and concern for others that was an outworking of her profound and well thought through Christian faith, living out the command of Christ: "All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must do to them".

We saw that humanity beautifully expressed in her love and care of Cecil. In the early days of their marriage they relished the opportunities of travel, of doing things together, of just being together. As Cecil’s health declined Audrey did everything to help Cecil retain his independence, his dignity, his humanity, bringing him to Church, to meetings, to family celebrations; and when care was beyond even Audrey’s capacity, visiting and cherishing him in the nursing home.

We come here today to thank God for this wonderful, warm human being. We come also to support with our presence, our prayers and our love, those who will miss her most. We think of her sons, David, Alan, Gary and Ian as well as Cecil’s sons David and Gary to whom she became a loving mother as well as grandchildren and close friends. You will be very much in our thoughts and prayers not only today but in the days and weeks to come and you come to terms with life without Audrey.

We come also to set our loss of Audrey and our own life and death in the context of our Christian faith. I spoke earlier of a profound Christian faith that was lived out in daily life, in love and service of others. The books that the family came across on her bookshelves speak of a heart and mind still

searching, seeking deeper understanding. Out of that faith, I sense someone who was comfortable with her mortality. I think it fitting that one of the lessons chosen by the family for this service is that lovely passage from Ecclesiastes, that speaks of the rhythm of life:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

.....

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

.....

a time to seek, and a time to lose;
a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

.....

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

I sense someone who picked up that rhythm in her own life, who found a peace and contentment in her own faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In life and in death she stands as a wonderful example of life lived in the service of others and the God she met in worship in this place and in St Mary's.

A time such as this is a time to reflect on our own mortality. In the hustle and bustle of life it is easy to push such things into the background. May Audrey's example of life lived in faith inspire each one of us to reflect on God's love for us in Christ.

She wrote a poem back in the year 2000 which some of her grandchildren are going to read, 'The Pleasures of Growing Older' in which something of that faith, that comfort with her mortality shines through, ending with a simple prayer of trust:

God be kind to me in my fading years,
When mind and body decay.
Let me go quickly and peacefully
Surrounded by love.

Even in their pain, the family are thankful that her prayer was answered.

In earlier days, Audrey got great pleasure from sailing. From the window in 'Avalon' Audrey and Cecil must have spent many happy hours looking out over Howth Harbour. The following is a poem that sets our hope for Audrey and for ourselves in the sailing tradition of this lovely place:

A Parable of Immortality.

I am standing by the seashore.
A ship at my side spreads her white sails to the morning breeze
and starts for the blue ocean.
She is an object of beauty and strength,
and I stand and watch
until at last she hangs like a speck of white cloud
just where the sun and sky come down to mingle with each other.
Then someone at my side says, 'There she goes! '
Gone where? Gone from my sight - that is all.
She is just as large in mast and hull and spar
as she was when she left my side
and just as able to bear her load of living freight
to the places of destination.
Her diminished size is in me, not in her.
And just at the moment when someone at my side says,
'There she goes! ',
there are other eyes watching her coming,
and other voices ready to take up the glad shout :
'Here she comes!'