

On this lovely spring day, we gather for the funeral of Hazel Ranken who died last Wednesday after a long battle with initially MS and then latterly cancer. She grew up in this area living initially on Claremont Road and then the Dublin Road, moving in 1991 to Damer Court following the death of her mother. She is remembered by family and former neighbours as a very caring individual, looking after her mother until her death. Unusually in today's terms, she worked all her life for KPMG, most of that as secretary to one person.

Janet Grant, on behalf of the family has shared memories and thanks giving the family have for Hazel.

As it turns out her death came in Holy Week, as we were preparing for Good Friday, the day on which we remember with a particular emphasis the death of our Lord Jesus Christ and her funeral comes only two days after we have celebrated his resurrection, his victory over the powers of sin and death in the wonderful festival that is Easter.

In a world that puts a great deal of store on status, we often judge people by the house they live in, the car they drive or even, when they die, by the numbers who turn out for their funeral. Jesus in his life, in his death and resurrection placed a supreme value on each individual.

In this life in which we live, we can only play the cards that we are dealt. Life was not always easy for Hazel. Her diagnosis of MS, coming as it did as she retired from work, meant that she was not able to do many of the things she would have liked to have done in her retirement.

The point I am coming to here is that, whatever value the world may place upon us, we have an inherent value as individuals. A value in the eyes of those we love and who love us. We each bring distinctive gifts to bear on this world in which we live. Today, in the quietness of this place, I invite you all to come before God with your memories of Hazel as aunt, as friend and give thanks to God for all that was good and true in her life. We commend her to the love and care of her heavenly Father with the simple prayer that he might now be at peace. I come back to this point that lies at the heart of our Christian faith - we each have a value in the sight of God.

There is something of this in a verse that the family found in Hazel's Hymn Book. Anna McSweeney will be sharing this with us as we go into prayer, later on in this service.

We read in Matthew's Gospel:

<sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. <sup>30</sup> And even the hairs of your head are all counted. <sup>31</sup> So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. *Matt 10:29-31*

For each one of us is made in God's image, in our strengths and in our vulnerability, each one of us carries something of the divine. Each one of us has a dignity before God.

On this day, we also we remember before God those who watched over and supported her; members of her family, former work colleagues and friends. In life you offered her love and support. On this, the day of her funeral, may you know something of God's presence and God's peace in your hearts.

We gather this morning to commend Hazel, our sister in Christ, aunt and friend to the care of her heavenly Father. As we do so we set our own lives in the context of eternity, our hopes and our fears, in the context of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying that he may watch over us and keep until the day of our own departure from this earth that we may rest in him as our hope is this our sister Hazel does.

We give them back to thee, dear Lord, who gavest them to us. Yet as thou didst not lose them in giving, so we have not lost them by their return. What thou gavest thou takest not away, O Lover of souls; for what is thine is ours also if we are thine. And life is eternal and love is immortal, and death is only an horizon, and an horizon is nothing save the limit of our sight. Lift us up, strong Son of God, that we may see further; cleanse our eyes that we may see more clearly; and draw us closer to thyself that we may know ourselves to be nearer to our loved ones who are with thee. And while thou dost prepare for us, prepare us also for that happy place, that where they are and thou art, we too may be for evermore.