

On Tuesday evening news started spreading that Sheila Morrison had died in the Blackrock Clinic. As the news spread, people started to share memories of this remarkable lady. A number of words started coming to mind:

Resilient

Zest for life

Humour

Kindness

Then the stories started to be told of her determination to keep up to date with modern technology – why shouldn't she use a computer, why shouldn't she have a smart phone – how else was she going to use Whatsapp and Facebook?

As I thought on these my mind went back to sitting in her sitting room one afternoon. She wasn't long home from a previous hospital stay and she was telling me about problems with her one remaining kidney and the possibility of dialysis. Then a grin; 'In the meantime I am going to enjoy life.' She may not have the energy to keep the garden the way she had in the past – but there were ways round that. Though I do remember walking past 'Weatherly' one morning on the way back from posting a letter – and there she was sweeping the path.

This for me caught two aspects of Sheila. There was an honesty as she looked at how things were (Remarking to me one day, 'I suppose none of us can last for ever') and that resilience, that zest for life we associate her with. She was determined to keep her independence, live in her own house, drive her own car and the family, Gaye and Judy and their families, honoured that desire and she really appreciated that, even if they were anxious for her at times. Family - her love for them and their love for her was a vital aspect of her life. I've only known her since 2005; so many of you will come here today with your own particular memories of Sheila, as sister, as mother, grandmother, great

grandmother and friend. The family will be sharing their own very particular, very personal memories. Today we bring those memories before God and thank God for the many different ways your lives were touched and enriched by Sheila.

The family have chosen as one of the lessons to be read today, that lovely passage from Ecclesiastes. It talks of all the ups and downs of life, of a rhythm of life – ‘There’s a time for everything under heaven ...’ Sheila in her own life had known the ups and downs of life, times of life, times of death, times of happiness and times of great sorrow. She had married David Higginbotham, and together they reared their daughters Gaye and Judy. Just as they were reared and were setting out on their own course in life, she was widowed at a relatively early age. She subsequently married Ian Morrison, who himself died 16 years ago.

She retained that resilience, that zest for life that we have been thinking about. Sheila was a longstanding and faithful member of this Parish. She was regular in public worship and this was an important part of her life. She valued the traditions of the Church of Ireland but at the same time recognised the need for change, the need to welcome youngsters, even if they made the odd bit of noise.

We have come to remember and give thanks. But of course the love that bound Sheila and the family together lives on as they remember with tears and laughter one who meant and continues to mean so much. Those of us outside the family circle come today to offer our love and support, to assure you of our love and our prayers in the days that lie ahead.

The death of anyone is also a reminder of our own mortality. As I think of Sheila's approach to life, I am reminded that this need not be a morbid preoccupation. She has left us a lovely example of life lived to the full, taking opportunities for new experiences, new developments – yet not denying the reality of a body wearing out and the weakness that goes with that. She did this in the context of a sincerely held faith in God expressed in worship, in service of others and in the simple enjoyment of the love of friends and family.

So today, in this Church in which she worshipped for so many years, we commend Sheila Morrison to the loving care and protection of Almighty God. I conclude with a piece that draws together our love of Sheila and the sailing traditions of this part of the world.

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!'