

ST ANDREW'S CHURCH GRAFHAM

'THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK'

21st April 2021

O LORD God, when thou givest to thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same unto the end, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory; through him, who for the finishing of thy work laid down his life, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Amen.

When I heard the Archbishop of Canterbury say this prayer at the funeral of the Duke of Edinburgh last Saturday, my first thought was that it was a good seafaring connection. The prayer has been attributed to Sir Francis Drake, the great Elizabethan sailor and explorer. However a bit of research showed that it would have had much more significance than that to Prince Philip. The prayer is based on words which Drake wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham, Secretary of State in May 1587 in connection with the series of attacks on Spain. Those words were only shaped into a prayer by the Dean of York, Eric Milner-White in 1941 when they were included in the second National Day of Prayer during the Second World War. A war in which Prince Philip himself served. The prayer was used again at the funeral of Earl Mountbatten of Burma, the uncle of Prince Philip, in 1979. We know that Prince Philip had planned his own funeral meticulously and so may assume that he'd requested this prayer. Moreover his life was characterised by the steadfastness expressed in the prayer.

It made me think how perhaps each of us has a prayer or prayers which have particular significance for us. Maybe it is one we associate with a particular moment in our lives or perhaps it is one to which we return again and again. This week you might like to think about a prayer which has special meaning for you and its associations. Possibly it is one that you would like used at your funeral. If so, make sure that other people know that! I found myself pondering too how rarely most of us think about our own funerals. We probably don't need to go into quite so much detail as for a royal funeral but it is a conversation worth having with our families so that they know any particular wishes. It clearly doesn't have to be a completely sombre conversation as the adapted Land Rover hearse last Saturday showed us.

But what about this prayer itself? Might it be one we could use either regularly or at significant moments ourselves? I wonder what might constitute 'a great matter' for each of us. It might be a major decision with far reaching consequences. It might be making a long term commitment to a particular way of life or course of action. It might be something quite small in other people's eyes - or even our own - but which nevertheless becomes the starting point for something with much greater impact. In saying that God gives us 'to endeavour [the] great matter' the prayer reminds us that we should discern whether the matter on which we are about to embark is in accordance with his will.

And if we have already begun 'to endeavour any great matter' this becomes a prayer for persistence in seeing through what we have undertaken. It echoes the opening verse of chapter 12 of the letter to the Hebrews which begins 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us'. However discernment is an ongoing process. Just as a seafarer will keep checking the compass and adjusting course accordingly, we need to reappraise prayerfully what we have undertaken and possibly make adjustments. Neither people nor situations remain static. Equally it might be that we need a little refreshment and renewal in order to continue the task. The prayer reminds us that it is in the completion of the task, in seeing it through, that true glory lies. In St John's Gospel shortly before he dies, Jesus says to his Father 'I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do'. His final words from the cross are 'it is finished', meaning it is completed, accomplished, perfected. Our work in life too should be about giving glory to God, not seeking it for ourselves..

As I wrote in the notices and mailing last Sunday, we are facing a challenging but exciting time in connection with our church building at St Andrew's. It occurs to me that this might be a good prayer for us all to use throughout the coming months.

With love and prayers

Camilla

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