

Hugh Fisher: Memorial Service 30.01.24 at St John and St Stephen's

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (read at the Crematorium).

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Romans 8: 35; 37-39 (read at the church).

Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It's difficult to know where to start in an address to commemorate Hugh, someone whose influence in the church here was so extensive. His faith was worked out in all aspects of his life – whether professional, family, volunteering or in church.

At the end Hugh's faith, and Judy's, was tested to the limit with his mystery infection and failing health. We fully expected him to return to church and his name is still dotted over the current worship rota. He only missed one PCC meeting at the end, and was very much active up until last autumn.

I think Hugh would be the first to admit he found letting go of his many and various roles difficult, even when perhaps it was time. He wasn't always easy to work with; his brain told him there was one way to do things, and usually he was right. But not always! And we loved him anyway. He was so competent and committed, that it was hard for him to see what other options there were except for him to carry on serving as he had for so long.

One of the last tasks he fretted over was sending out renewal invitations for the Transport Ticket Society, which he tasked some other church members to deliver to the post for him, giving instructions from his hospital bed in Wokingham.

I used to somewhat dread leaving out some vital piece of information at a PCC meeting, knowing full well that Hugh would notice and point it out, and of course, when he did, it invariably shed further light on the issue and clarified some obscure details that no one else had spotted. His unfailingly polite and kind manner would lull people into feeling that in fact it probably was best if we did it that way after all!

It goes without saying that in many of the active areas of church life, Hugh was right at the centre, giving of his time and energy, and often over the course of many years – whether it was Contact Centre; RE Inspired; house group, the Buildings and Plant group and of course being our Treasurer for many more years than was probably good for him. He'd also done Youth Work, volunteered at Greenbelt and driven for the Duchess of Kent Hospice where he finally ended his time on earth.

He'd been a staunch supporter of Judy in her ongoing health needs and a wonderful dad and granddad. There's a thread of commitment to Christ which ties all these things together.

At the short funeral service that preceded this, we heard a reading from 2 Corinthians 4, where Paul describes hardship and suffering as 'a slight momentary affliction' which is preparing the believer for 'an eternal weight of glory'. Anyone who saw Hugh and Judy holding hands in church week by week, while also dealing with health concerns and hospital check-ups and visits, would agree that they faced these afflictions with a steady uncomplaining faith. Hugh's own faith had a weightiness about it that stood the test of time.

I particularly remember the enthusiastic way Hugh embraced Morning Prayer online during lockdown. He loved being 'the other voice' in the responses, and read the Old Testament with relish and with a deep and detailed understanding of the story of salvation. It was during these times that it felt like I had a co-leader in Hugh; he had so much knowledge of the faith and life experience following Christ and serving the church.

But it was more than that – there was a freshness about his faith which I think we can all aspire to. The level of enthusiasm and insight Hugh brought to his faith, even in old age, was noteworthy. Even in his 70s, it sometimes felt as though he'd just discovered the bible. Where others would decline to read or leave volunteering till no one else had done so, Hugh was actively delighted if he got given a reading - or any task really - and disappointed if he didn't. He was like the keen child in the front row who's always putting up their hand.

When he led the Intercessions for us, it often felt as though he would really like to break into a sermon - I think some were worried he would – but I'm sure if he had, it would've been more than equal to the substance of a lot of trained preachers' sermons.

And Hugh's enthusiasm extended to singing as well. He was wholehearted in his worship, and he had a very good singing voice, and the reason I know this is because normally he could be heard holding onto the last note of every song just a little longer than everyone else. So that's how we know!

Who will separate us from the love of Christ?' Paul asks in Romans 8. As you know, he goes on to list a whole lot of things that are indeed momentous – death, life, everything we see around us, the things that are yet to come – but none of them is able to separate us from the love of God in Christ.

As we come to terms with not having Hugh with us in body, as it were, we ask God for grace to let him go into the peace and rest of Christ. It won't be easy because we're still in 'sad surprise' mode that he's not here still.

We do give thanks for everything he meant, though, and we look forward to the day when we shall be united with Hugh, as we are all caught up into the new creation of which Christ is the herald by his resurrection.

Amen.

