

Funeral homily for Elaine Williams at All Saints church, Boyne Hill 19th March, 2020

Mark Ch 9:30-37

One of the abiding images I have of Elaine is of her seeing a young Maxime Fullarton bounding across the quadrangle and Elaine welcoming him into the office and offering him a smile and a biscuit. The story today is of the lady who welcomed the child and those who needed help.

The reading I have chosen from Mark's gospel was the set text for Shrove Tuesday. It's a challenging text that asks us to think about the type of Saviour Jesus was. People like the disciples had a real problem with what Jesus was trying to convey to them. How could they believe in a Messiah who would suffer and then die? People then as they do now would expect a modern-day Superhero like Superman or Wonder woman. Today we are no different to the disciples still concerned with status and what the Christian faith is going to do for us. There is sense that the Gospel exists only for us to feel good about ourselves. If Jesus is the Messiah, then we too by following Him can be all powerful. Then Jesus picks up a child the one who at the time had little status or prestige and Jesus says 'If anyone welcomes one child in my name, they welcome me, and if they welcome me they welcome the one who sent me.'

The text talks about welcome, how we are to welcome all people. The child is representative of the vulnerable and needy, those who seek spiritual and practical help, those who want guidance with key events in their lives, those who want to simply be listened to or valued.

About 10 years ago All Saints Church started something called 'Church on the Move'. We went to different people's homes and celebrated the Eucharist, discussed a particular area of ministry and shared food. Once at Chris and Mike Watts house we talked about the role of the people in the office. This is the first port of call for people to see, hear and experience the face of the church. In Elaine we had the most endearing and loving face of the church.

When it came to the young families Elaine would support Tiny Saints (She was welcoming families just before Christmas), she would provide food with Chris for Rock Shop and would help plan baptisms and welcome school classes with drinks and biscuits in church.

Elaine was also the one who listened to peoples needs. Before Christmas this year a lady called the office to say that she wanted to speak to Elaine. Elaine 2 years ago, had at the end of a day working two hours beyond that which she should have done (A typical Day) had bumped into the lady at the church gates distressed. The lady was experiencing serious marriage problems and Elaine took the lady into church and listened for an hour and prayed with her.

At Baptism preparation Elaine would organise and collate information. Elaine would be there at the back of church at Baptism services offering a smile of encouragement and re-assurance to sometimes nervous folk entering the church. Elaine was the person who shared a trip with me all those years ago to Cippenham to experience 'Godly Play' the beautiful way of sharing symbols and stories with children.

People excited and also anxious about planning their wedding would build such good relations with Elaine that she was frequently invited to attend the service and letters of thanks would be received at the office thanking her for the guidance and support she had offered them.

Funerals when people are often devastated at the loss of a loved one were met either in person or over the phone by Elaine who would calmly guide the family through the initial stages of planning.

Anyone could walk into the office including many people from church who might be feeling down or simply wanting a chat and receive Elaine's listening ear and a tea/coffee and biscuit. For the disorganised vicar arriving at 10am on a Tuesday morning she would bring some level of organisation and a fair bit of laughter into my morning. The number of times I had forgotten something or not been able to meet a commitment and Elaine had stepped into help are numerous.

Socially Elaine and her loving family invited me many times to celebrate occasions like Elaine's 70th and 75th birthday's, Roast Welsh Lamb on Easter Day accompanied by a few bottles of wine and more recently to her 80th birthday party. This last one saw Elaine forcing the doctors to let her leave hospital so that she could get her hair cut and styled and look fantastic for the never to be forgotten evening at the Bull Inn at Bisham with wonderful food, drinks and company.

Towards the end of her life and at home, a number of us visited on St David's Day. Even that day Elaine made everyone feel at ease as she spoke words of encouragement to us. Her humour still to the fore as I tried to straighten her sheets she said with a smile 'Thought you were going to jump in!'

On the Monday the family sat round her bed and shared funny family stories of holiday adventures as we shared homemade Welsh cakes. Early that evening Elaine moved quietly from life to death. Even in death Elaine made us all feel at ease, making it better for us. The family offered me a glass of wine to celebrate a wonderful life. I broke my Lent fast, but it was worth it.

Elaine believed that Jesus died and rose again, she loved Holy Week and read at the Easter Vigil where resurrection life overcomes death and throughout her life Elaine welcomed many little children into her arms and in welcoming them, welcomed our Lord and God.

Thank -you Elaine, from all of us. Well done good and faithful servant, may you rest in peace and rise in Glory.

In the name of the father, Son and Holy Spirit. AMEN.