

14th September 2022

Simplicity

“Generally nature hangs out a sign of simplicity in the face of God.”

Thomas Fuller, *The Holy State and the Profane State* (1642)

With friends in Wiltshire, I've spent time recently in a number of small country churches. I can't go past an open church without having a peek inside. Sometimes it's just a quick look. Often, it's a lingering visit, with artefacts studied, history absorbed, a candle lit or an impressive window photographed. This week these country churches have been open to allow local folk and visitors access to a sanctuary for a Book of Condolence to be signed in the week between Queen Elizabeth's death and her State Funeral. If I'd been at home, I would have added my name to a book in a local church. So I've signed a book in a church that was unfamiliar to me.

In these little churches, I've been surrounded by simplicity. Yet in that simplicity there has been depth and wonder. There's been simplicity in the brief comments people have written before they've signed; simplicity in the trappings of worship, as straightforward as they've always been for the worshipping congregation; simplicity in the lay-out of the church. Such simplicity has echoed for me some of the meaningful moments of this past week: the drawing of Paddington Bear and words of a child with flowers outside Balmoral; the kiss shared between King Charles and one of the people in the crowd at Buckingham Palace; the curtsying by the Princess Royal at the door of the Palace of Holyrood; prayers of a Kirk elder in a service in St Giles before the Queen lay in state.

In the midst of the pomp and ceremony, words spoken and speeches made, parliaments assembled and addressed, parades and bands, services and crowds, simplicity matters. When the music is stilled and words are no more, when silence takes the place of bustle and chatter, when the fancy and special give way to the personal reflections of our very soul, when the Queen's funeral is past, simplicity will still matter.

“Generally, nature hangs out a sign of simplicity in the face of God,” wrote the English churchman and historian, Thomas Fuller, in the 17th Century. This week, and as the day of the late Queen's funeral approaches, I'm learning more and more what that means.

A prayer for today

Lord, when words aren't enough, help me to believe that simplicity works. Amen

An original reflection by @ Tom Gordon

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