



RITUAL AND REMEMBRANCE

Funeral of young man killed in a road traffic accident at the age of 21

Introduction

I know that all of us who're here today are feeling completely gutted at having to be here doing what we're doing.

What has happened to Stevie isn't right, and if we feel bitter and angry, as well as deeply grieved at the unfairness of it all, there is no-one in heaven or earth who can blame us.

Things aren't meant to be like this. Everything's meant to be different.

And there are just no easy words we can say that can explain the injustice of what has happened to Stevie.

All we can do today is be whatever comfort we can be to and all of Stevie's family, and remember also who's still in hospital, and pray for her and her family too.

Apart from this, all we can do is be here for Stevie, and surround him with words of kindness and respect, and give thanks for and honour all the goodness that was in him, and lay him to rest in the warm embrace of this love, this kindness and this gratitude.

Readings

(1) Thou art before me, Lord, thou art behind (*Ian Pitt-Watson's version of Psalm 139*)
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(2) It's not always easy to say in any kind of simple way that we have faith in God. Sometimes, when things go as wrong as this, it's just too much to say that we have any faith inside us.

At best, perhaps, what we feel, if we feel anything at all, is less like faith and more like stubbornness, the sheer stubborn refusal to give up or let go, or to stop believing, despite what has happened, that life is good, and that our love for each other is what makes it good,

I think the Bible recognises this kind of stubbornness as the only kind of faith we can have at times, and I think it's something like this kind of stubbornness that we hear reflected in these words from Romans, Chapter 8 (*adapted from JB Philips' version*)

*In view of all this, what can we say?
If God is for us, who can be against us?
Certainly not God, who did not even keep back his own Son, but gave him up for us all!*

*...So what can separate us from the love of Christ?
Can trouble do it? Or hardship, sickness, poverty or death?
No, in all these things we have complete victory through him who loved us!*

*For I have become absolutely convinced that neither death nor life,
neither any power from above nor any authority here below,
neither what is happening to us today nor what might happen to us tomorrow,
nor anything else in all creation will ever be able to separate us
from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Tribute

Since the day of the accident, I don't think I've heard anything except very kind and very genuine words about Stevie.

I know that those of us who're maybe feeling today not just older, but undeservedly older, than Stevie, or who perhaps grew up with him, who brought him up or who watched him grow up, might perhaps be feeling that, at 21, he was just a boy.

But he wasn't. He was a man and a good man at that. This is what so many people have been saying this past week, as we've all struggled to come to terms with the tragedy that brings us together now.

Details of Stevie's life...

So today, despite the sharpness of our pain,
we give thanks for the good son Stevie has been to,
for the grandson he's been to,
for the much-loved brother he's been to,
for the dear friend who's going to be missed so much by and by many others.

This is a sad, cruel goodbye that we're having to say today. All we can be grateful for is who Stevie was and what he meant to everyone who loved him, liked him, enjoyed him and appreciated him, for the fact that his life, though short, was a good and happy life, and that the memories of him are always going to be good and warm.

I believe that Stevie is with God now, not by God's will or by ours or Stevie's, but it is the purpose of the prayers we say today not just to let go of Stevie but to assure ourselves that we are placing him, spirit and soul, into the hands of a God who loves him and cares for him every bit as much as we do.

So in trying to hold on to this faith, let's pray once again...

For possible inclusion in final prayer

Lord, we know that nothing is going to be quite the same again. Our hearts have been wounded by this grief and the scars we now have will always be there. We wish to you and to all that's good and right that things were not like this. But young though he was we are glad that we have had the gift of Stevie's life.

We're glad of his love and his friendship, we glad to have known him and loved him, and we're glad, cruelly though his life has ended,

that our memories of him are always going to be good and warm and happy.

Benedictions

Now may the God of grace set his blessing on us
as we share the sorrow of this day together.
May the God of life not darken his light to us.
May the God of life not close his joy to us.
May the God of life not refuse his mercy to us...
But crown us and those we love with the gift of eternal life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

*And now to him who can keep us from falling
and lift us from the dark valley of despair to the bright mountain of hope,
from the midnight of desperation to the daybreak of joy,
to this God, Father, Son and Spirit,
be the glory, now and forever, Amen. (Martin Luther King Jr.)*