SERMON AT FUNERAL OF JULIET O’CONNOR

I know how grateful Dan will be to see all of you here. It is a precious thing that people who have walked part of the road with Dan and Juliet stand now with Dan in loving sympathy and support. We offer to you Dan – to your two sons Aidan and Tim, to Emily and to your grandchildren, Joseph, Christy, Elijah & Catherine and to Cameron and Lewis – our love, our deep sympathy and the assurance that we will pray for you in the days to come.

Two disciples walk the road to Emmaus. I know that Dan warms to the idea that they were a couple – and so the journey with the Jesus whom they came to recognize in the breaking of bread was part of the journey of their love for one another – their journey in relationship. So the two disciples walk with the mysterious stranger. They talk over all that has happened. But it is only in the sharing of a meal and the breaking of bread together that their eyes are opened and they recognize him. Did not our hearts burn with us as we talked with him on the way? So the mystical union which links us to one another in Christian marriage also links us to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Dan and Juliet began their shared journey by travelling to India where Dan taught and was Chaplain at the school owned by the Cambridge Mission to Delhi and Juliet also taught at the British Diplomatic School. These were formative years – in the sense that they were at the heart of a very colonial culture. But the deeper journey they were on – a journey with Jesus – led them to realise that, while this might be the past, it could not be the future. Juliet also worked with the wives of the servants – teaching them to sew and to become self-sufficient.

And then like so many of us, they found themselves in Scotland – Episcopalian Chaplain in St Andrews University and teaching in St Leonards School. It was another stage on that journey of learning by teaching. It was during this period that Juliet began another journey – the onset of her rheumatoid arthritis. And at this point Dan and Juliet again stepped outside the accepted norms of that time by offering space to homosexual couples at a time when those relationships were illegal. And the ever-talented Juliet sold paintings to help the family budget.

The Emmaus journey with Jesus reached its fulfilment when the two disciples recognized Jesus. From my perspective, Dan and Juliet’s journey reached its fulfilment in their time at Selly Oak. I first began to understand the significance of this when I started to travel extensively within the Anglican Communion. I would write about where I was and whom I had met on my blog. And Dan would pop up in the comments

So I sat in Kampala, looking out over the city and the Gadaffi Mosque and discussing the Islamisation of Africa with Archbishop Ian Ernest, Primate of the Province of the India Ocean – a pupil of Dan’s. And there was James Tengatenga, formerly Bishop of Southern Malawi, and now outgoing Chair of the Anglican Consultative Council and a staff member at Sewannee in Tennessee from which I hold an honorary degree – Juliet was his tutor. And when I went to Kerala in Southern India for the International Dialogue with the World Reformed Communion, I was with Bishop Kumara of Sri Lanka – another pupil.

This is really significant because this part of the journey was about a fundamental change in the Anglican Communion and Juliet and Dan were at the heart of it. We moved to a partnership church with local leadership. And Juliet and Dan were hugely important in the work of preparing that local leadership for the next stage of the journey of the Anglican Church as a global communion.

But the journey went on. Juliet and Dan have practiced hospitality so others from all over the world have come and joined the journey. And there has been Juliet’s Lent Group in Balmullo which somehow didn’t find the end of its journey at the end of Lent and simply went on and on and on.

And probably most important of all is the voice which we hear in Juliet’s writing. It’s the voice of a contemplative person – a person who is spiritually strong because she has somehow absorbed her illness and pain and made it part of the journey:

*‘If you are called to a life of prayer, heartily rejoice that God has seen fit to draw from you qualities that have lain dormant during their maturing and now enable you to be ready for his service, and for a fuller life in the beautiful or difficult circumstances you are given.*

*Look forward to the future and never give up; God is for ever*

*Bless the Lord O my soul and all that is within me bless his holy name.*

And if God is for ever – if the Emmaus journey with the mysterious stranger becomes a fuller journey with Jesus – we now stand in that place where people of faith always end up standing. We stand in the presence of death – feeling deeply our loss and sadness. Yet we proclaim resurrection hope. In her journey of faith – in the journey shared with Dan and with Jesus Christ – Juliet has lived that hope through the poverty of India, through her own illness, through her love for her children and grandchildren, through all the challenges which are part of the life of every family, through her care for her students and those whom she helped to find their full potential as the children of God.

Our Christian hope is that that journey now finds its true fulfilment in the love and forgiveness of God – and waiting for a joyful resurrection in the power of God – to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen

Cate Brown

Revd Lynn Brady - Minister Abernethy and Chaplain to Hospital in Cupar