**Andrew’s Memorial service Sermon/ Reflection Aug 2nd 2022 Keri Thomas and Mark Thomas**

**Intro words**

We welcome those here, family and friends, visitors and choir . And especially those who are with us in spirit at this moment , commemorating this somewhere else and who will be viewing this recording later.

We thank all of the cathedral who have made this Memorial service possible in this very special place at this very special time and the recording that will go out to many of the Rodger family and other family and friends who are not able to be here but are remembering this moment as we remember the goodness of Andrew .

We are grateful to Philippa White , Bethan Winter ,Bishop Peter Wheatley , the choir who came together at the last minute to bring us glorious music and the cathedral staff for allowing us to take this moment to pause and to remember , at this time of commemorating 40 years since the death of Andrew Rodger.

 My name is Mark Thomas; I’m a licensed Anglican priest in the Witney team.….

My wife Keri, Andrew’s widow, wanted to say a few words from us both and for me to speak on her behalf,( as she knows she might struggle to get the words out without tears !).

Today, the 40th anniversary of Andrew’s death , is both a celebration of his life, a commemoration of all that he was , reflecting on how his life and death permeate our lives , and finally considering a few thoughts on living with dying in the light of our mortality.

**Readings**

The first reading from 1 Corinthians 13 , was read at Andrew and Keri’s wedding in 1980, taken by Andrew’s father Bishop Patrick here in this place, speaks to us of the importance of love –‘the greatest of these is love’- and how the underlying force of love shows itself in action –,’ slow to anger, not resentful, not quick to take offence” . It also points to the mystery that we are exploring today– ‘Love never ends….For now we see in a mirror dimly; but then we shall see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I am fully known.’ .

The Gospel reading from Matthew. 25 was one that Andrew and Keri studied together in the Taizé community in France as students; it speaks of love translated into action in the world , the social gospel- asking “ when did we see you hungry and thirsty and did this to you”-…. if we’d only known it was you !This is the universal Christ , seeing Christ in everyone we meet .

**1.Andrew**

Some of the facts of Andrew’s life are summarised in your order of service , son of Patrick who was formerly Bishop here and Margaret Rodger, brother to Jock, wife to Keri , born in Edinburgh, dying in Africa aged 24 .

His connection with this place of Christchurch is very strong,

* as a student, reading History, living here at Canterbury 3.1 ,
* as a regular member of the chaplaincy congregation here led by the then chaplain Anthony Priddis,
* with his brother Jock as an acolyte at his father’s enthronement as Bishop here in 1978,
* later in 1980 as a bridegroom (as in the picture on the front cover taken just a few steps away in Tom Quad) at the altar rail marrying Keri
* and only two years later buried in the Christchurch graveyard just behind St Lucy’s Chapel .

These ancient monastic stones have seen so many lives come and go and this is but one , but it’s good today make space to pause to reflect on Andrew, 40 years on.

 Jock , Andrew’s brother told us of their closeness as brothers, adopted by older parents who led peculiar lives, moving from Scotland to Switzerland and back to England. Their love for the boys was very strong but as older parents they would leave them to play and invent games, and they forged a great bond as two young brothers, different but bound together, which has never left Jock and his family . He describes Andrew as athletic and competitive, highly academic and with a strong faith.

Bishop Anthony Priddis, his university chaplain, remembers Andrew arriving at Christchurch as a young undergraduate to read history. He shone out because he had a light in him and drew others to God by the way he lived. He was special in a self-effacing, down to earth way, compassionate, thoughtful, intelligent.

Kara who was Keri‘s bridesmaid here in 1980 says Andrew’s authenticity , love and care for people are her overriding memories of him, and also remembering him at parties being known as ‘rent- a-man’ because he would dance with everyone and would always be there doing the washing up at the end. Others mention his glowing commitment to life and energy and his strong ambition to serve.

There are facts around Andrew’s death which are tragic and poignant to hear, dying as he did in a car accident in Botswana as Keri and Andrew were visiting people in Botswana and Southern Africa , taking documents from the General Synod to Desmond Tutu in support of the anti-apartheid movement. Andrew was a very ardent supporter of the anti-apartheid movement here in the UK and in Southern Africa , so his strong desire to go right to the heart of the troubled areas of South Africa at the peak of the Apartheid regime , came from his radical politics and desire to take action, as part of his social gospel , and a yearning for both him as a teacher and Keri as a doctor, to maybe contribute there in future , ……..

 ‘ when did we see you hungry and thirsty’…..

The tragic fact of the accident , happening just a few minutes after they had swapped driving, and just 10 minutes after that last photo on your Order of Service was taken , led to Andrew’s early death at the age of just 24. The funeral was held in London taken by Peter Wheatley at the church at which Andrew had served as churchwarden and they both had attended.

Suddenly all those who knew Andrew felt struck down by his tragic loss, the life unlived , and made suddenly aware of our own mortality, and the imminence of death shattering life. And somehow life went on .

**2.Reflection -So how do we somehow try make sense of his death, or the death of someone we love, as we see through a glass darkly?**

How has this reality of Andrew’s death permeated our lives ?

Keri and I married in 1984 a few years after Andrew’s death and have been blessed with five children and a very happy family life of which somehow Andrew. has always been part , as our children and now grandchildren all testify .

 We feel that Andrew is always with us, part of our family, overlooking and laughing at our mistakes, our attempts to live well ,cheering us on and encouraging us , sometimes with his favourite Cadburys finger biscuits .

And we have forged a life, lived within the reality of death and dying, holding both realities together , enabling something to penetrate our lives that transcends the day-to-day living , deeper than words can impart, bringing together somehow this earthly life and life beyond death .

This has particularly affected Keri’s work as a doctor . Her pioneering work has been devoted to improving end of life care and she developed a movement , known as Gold Standards Framework or GSF , enabling gold standard care for people nearing the end of life in all settings for people with all conditions, that has affected the lives of millions of people in this country , become mainstreamed and with great international reach, for which she was awarded an OBE .

We later together founded a charity in Andrew’s name ,specifically to bring this learning to Africa, known as the Andrew Rodger Trust. More details are on the website shown in the notes.

We feel guided by Andrew in many areas of our lives. There is a story Keri tells of feeling lost and found . Andrew used to navigate when they drove together (before the days of Sat Navs) and soon after his death, Keri was visiting a friend and became terribly lost in the dark , desperately missing Andrew’s helpful navigation . In despair, she turned into a side road and suddenly the car headlights fell upon the name of the road , which cut her to her core and also made her laugh – the name of the road was ‘Andrew’s Close’. Somehow it felt at that moment, Andrew was there , chuckling at her mistakes.

Keri has felt she has in some ways since then been living life for two, carrying on something of what Andrew would have wanted to do and supported by his strength, so that work in end of life care has been a vital part of our lives.

 I’ve also been involved in this work both as a parish priest for over 40 years and as a director of The Gold Standards Framework from the beginning. There is a sense in which much of this has turned this tragic ending or ‘no’ to life into a ‘yes’ to life

**3.And what about all of us? How, as mortals , can we bring together the reality of death within our lives, perhaps even as a positive force for good ?**

The ancient Stoics spoke of remembering the inevitability of death each day as a positive reminder , Momento Mori-‘ remember that you must die', and how short a time it is from birth to death.

The Venerable Bede describes the Sparrow flying through the banqueting hall as our journey through life , in one window and out through another, ‘comparing our short life on earth with that which we have no knowledge’.

 Irvin Yalom Stamford Professor of Psychiatry says “ Its not easy living every moment wholly aware of death. Its like trying to stare at the sun,- you can stand only so much….but though the physicality of dying destroys us, the idea of death can save us”

We all know that we are going to die, and yet we live almost as if we will live forever. Is there a way of enabling the finality of our mortality to work for good in our lives ? The ‘end’ of life in terms of chronological time affecting the ‘end’ of life in terms of the meaning we make of life . Facing our mortality head-on, as Keri did at that young age, can transform us and help us live life in all its fullness now .

And for those that are bereaved, how do we encompass both life and death in our lives at the same time and continue to live with our loved one’s memory as an energy at the heart of our lives ?

It’s said that ‘grief is love that hasn’t found a home’. It is an energy , sometimes a foundational fear that we accommodate, moving through it and integrating into our lives.

As Keri’s and my experience of work with the dying in hospices and elsewhere has shown, living with dying can help to give a new perspective on life, refocussing on different priorities , a heightened sense of the importance of living every day to the full, an abundance of life , in alignment with our purpose and meaning , appreciating what we have with overflowing gratitude, living each day as if it was our last.

 Some people can grow through what is obviously painful suffering , known now as ‘ post traumatic growth’ . It’s a hard thing to make sense of suffering and death .

But it can teach us great lessons , beyond our words and our thoughts, and we can all grow in our perspective of living with dying , letting go through the ‘ small deaths’ in life , as the Good Friday to Easter story reminds us daily.

Ira Byock a palliative care doctor, suggests we shouldn’t leave to the last minute on our deathbed the time when we say to those we love, the 4 things that matter most –

**‘Please forgive me…., I forgive you …. thank you ……and I love you. ‘**

Living this brief time on earth in the context of our dying can be liberating as well as for some frightening., freeing us to be more than we currently are , forgiving others and ourselves 70×7, living beyond ourselves , living a life of thankfulness and abundance,

**Final words**

And so , bringing these reflections together, we give thanks for Andrew, at this moment , 40 years since his death and celebrate all that he was and all that he gave,

and offer some thoughts on how we maybe can respond to this mystery of life and death that all of us mortals face .…

Firstly, can we **see differently .**

Can we live with the awareness that **this** life is not all we have , there is more than we can see and hear and touch…We appreciate this natural world of which we are a small part, aware of our role within it, yet aware of all that that we don’t see , somehow connecting with that,

and with our ongoing relationship with those whose love reaches us beyond death.

Also, can we  **be different** .

Connected to that greater source of love, with the light of an Easter faith , we can perceive love breaking through beyond the darkness of death , calling us to both receive and reflect God’s love .

We can recognise that our greatest ambition is to love.

 And seeing Christ shining through the eyes of people– “inasmuch as you did it to these the least of my brothers and sisters, you did it to me “

And thirdly we can **live differently**

We can live not in fear, fear of death , or fear of anything, but we can transcend this fear knowing we are held and loved to live a life in all its fullness .

And in gratitude for Andrew’s life, for others who have gone before us, for our blessings and for all we have received in our lives, to live a life of love and service , and as Richard Rohr puts it, to take the risk to live a life that’s greater than our own.