**AT THE FUNERAL OF BRENDA MARSTON | 26.04.2022**

**1 Peter 3: 8-22; 1 Corinthians 13**

***Brenda Remembered:***

**Every life has its ups and downs and Brenda’s has certainly had its highs and lows – perhaps more like peaks and troughs!**

**An ambition to travel and to make a decent career for herself took her to leave Yorkshire for work in the Justice Department in New Zealand and a great friendship with Dolly and Les and their son Don; and after marriage and the birth of Louise and Dean, time in Australia as a machinist and back to NZ’s North Island (Lake Taupo) before sailing back to the UK during which Louise celebrated her 10th birthday. A new job in the Civil Service augured well until, 40 years ago, she suffered the terrible accident when a motorbike fell onto her leg and smashed it to smithereens, ending her career at a stroke.**

**Separated in 1977, Brenda and the children moved to Duchy Drive and then later she made her home in Winter Court where she was incredibly happy and had no intention of leaving despite all those steps! Happiness too with Norman Sutcliffe, a childhood sweetheart, with whom Brenda became very close after his wife died but who himself died of skin cancer 20 years ago.**

**She found happiness here too within the family of St Martin’s. She was an integral part of the congregation where she, and her stool, could always be relied upon to support our worship not just on Sundays but on weekday high days and holy days too, for group discussions in the Vicarage and as a member of the Highfield Area Communions with Lilian Whitaker, Judith Freeth, Kathleen Damant, Freda Scott, Doris Wrightson, Lily Spence, Dorothy Tane, Dot Verity and Edna Killerby among others.**

**But her Winter Court flat was her domain and it was there that we heard of her support for Thai snooker players, of her telephone contacts with friends all over the world; and of course her constant interest in family news from Louise and Dean, Beverley, Elizabeth, Clarissa and Philippa; and more recently the events leading to Dean’s sad death in 2020.**

**These last ten years in particular have not been easy as her ability to get out of the flat became first, very difficult and then impossible. But always, on the phone or in visits, the same determination to make the best of what she had. And she really did have it her way, managing to survive to the age of 89 despite it all. Not for nothing her musical choice at Nab Wood earlier today: Bridge over troubled waters!**

***The Address:***

**It is both lovely, and a huge privilege, to be invited back to St Martin’s today to celebrate the life - and the faith - of Brenda Marston. Despite being geographically a bit further out in the parish, up there in her flat in Sandy Lane, she was one of the key members of the community for each of the sixteen years of my time here so I guess I have known her for almost thirty years. And she knew us and in a completely non saccharine way, took great interest in the Vicarage family at that time. I am only sorry that Maria, Sinead and Catriona aren’t able to be here too but they all send their love: this place remains a huge store of very happy memories.**

**I said earlier that Brenda was a very regular member of this congregation and you won’t be surprised that she set out very clear instructions for today! And so the choice of 1 Corinthians for the reading is hers, a great upbeat song in praise of love. *Love is patient, love is kind, love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way, is not irritable or resentful.***

**And I think that Brenda really did try to model her life on each of those principles. Her conversations about other people were nearly always positive and generous and the idea that *love believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things* was very much her aim, even if she fell short occasionally – as we all do.**

**But the choice of the first reading from 1 Peter is mine because I wanted to go beyond the theory of 1 Corinthians and face, four square, the challenge that Brenda has had to wrestle with in all those years following the accident: what might her life have been like if that motorbike hadn’t fallen on her leg?**

**Because a handicap of that sort didn’t just see off her career in the Civil Service, it quite obviously had a profound effect on all her horizons, on her patience and her relationships. There were always places she couldn’t go, things she couldn’t do. That leg, literally and metaphorically, was always liable to ‘get in the way’. It was always ‘the elephant in the room’; not mentioned but impossible to overlook. However much she ‘grinned and bore it’, she knew that she couldn’t be quite like everyone else and her very real ambition for herself and for those she knew had to be trimmed as a result.**

**For the rest of us who largely enjoy good health, it is very difficult for us to really understand what that must have felt like. Frustration yes, a bit of envy? So often she put a brave face on it but all those close to Brenda were aware of the cost. I well remember her desire to take part in one of Audrey Dawson’s car hunts. But she had to remain in the car throughout. Of course Brenda could be sharp and she could be stubborn; frankly who wouldn’t be?**

**So this 1st reading from Peter takes us to the next level - of how to cope, when faced with unrelenting pain and disappointment. Peter writes: *Be sympathetic, loving one another with a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse. On the contrary repay with a blessing. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers…***

**And how was she, for so much of the time, able to do that? By being a person of regular prayer. Not all those hours ‘home alone’ were spent in front of that enormous television and its access to every sport and news channel! Apart from being well read Brenda spent a lot of praying – holding each of us in her heart and mind before the Lord – not as a social convention but as a real contribution to our regular wellbeing – however far away we were from Sandy Lane. People often ask what is the point of nuns and monks and the answer is the same: that they remember the likes of you and me when we find ourselves too busy to pray; they literally pray on our behalf. So 7, Winter Court was a bit like a cloister and St Martin’s and each of us are the stronger for her remembering us, *with a tender heart,* on a very regular basis. Not for nothing this funeral started with ‘Be still for the presence of the Lord’. As her favourite expression had it, ‘Yes indeed!’**

**But let’s go back to that question about what life would have been like if the motor-bike hadn’t fallen on her? Perhaps her career, in the Civil Service would have really taken off; perhaps she could have intervened in a different way when things in the family were not so easy…**

**But ‘what if’s’ live in dangerous territory. That kind of speculation can lead one to be very bitter and have the effect of closing down the opportunities that remain. So we cannot but finish our tribute to this amazingly brave woman by recalling her ability to rely on her faith to see her through.**

**Somehow, even in her times of huge loneliness, she found the resources to overcame this huge tragedy**

**In the words of Psalm 26: *I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Test me, O Lord, and try me, examine my heart and my mind, for your love is ever before me and I will bathe for ever in your truth. Strengthen me that I am lead a blameless life, redeem me and be merciful to me so that I may stand on level ground and come, at the last, to praise you in the great assembly…***

**Or in the words of that first hymn:**

***No work too hard for him;***

***in faith receive from him.***

***Be still for the presence of the Lord***

***is moving in this place.***

**One final thought, a scrap from a conversation we shared many years ago. It was written by a survivor of Auschwitz who had told the story of how she and an old man survived a dreadful train journey in the freezing cold. It goes like this:**

***Allow me to tell you the secret of survival in this world? When you warm the heart of others, then you will warm yourself. When you support, strengthen and encourage others, then you receive support, strengthening and encouragement in your life too.***

**May Brenda rest in peace and rise in glory.**