

## **SERMON 4 FUNERAL OF BEATRICE AWOONOR-RENNER | 05.04.23**

**Of all the photographs of members of the St James' congregation that 'captures' their personality, I am most happy with this one of Beatrice. Of course she didn't want her photo taken - but loved the fact that it was! She really was one of God's humble people – but still liked a fuss made of her and always enjoyed company. Her long years of widowhood were not enjoyable and yet, if ever you asked her how she was, she would say 'I'm managing'. She had a wonderful knack of making the best of what there was.**

**In many ways, for lots of us here tonight, she fitted the description of a 'wise woman'. In Greek and Roman literature - and I suspect in her native Sierra Leone too - wise women (or sages) were the people to whom the rest of us would turn when we needed advice and encouragement. There are five classic elements: *they are people who have no time for anything but the Truth; they are self-disciplined and careful; they often feel that their talents and gifts are not properly recognised; they make time for people, offering sound advice - even if it is not necessarily the kind of advice we want to hear; and they do their homework and know a lot about a lot of things.***

**And the more I read in my little guide, the more I could see Beatrice fitting these descriptions: *the wise woman seeks truth above all things. She thinks about matters deeply and always wants to know the whole picture – both the problems and the state of her own inner being. However much she loves the person she is talking to, head comes before heart. She is logical and wants things resolved in a sensible way. Above all she wants to share her insights and knowledge – not to seem more important or clever, but because she genuinely desires what is best for us. She is grounded in reality and an ever-willing shoulder to lean on. She is stable, not easily swayed by the trials and tribulations of life and she exudes a calm confidence that all will be well...***

**The guide goes on: *she may often seem more comfortable in the company of men. She refuses to be a victim - however tragic her own circumstances.***

**So much of that rings true for Beatrice.**

**But of course the thing that is missing from all that is faith. She had been taught her faith by her father and had embraced it and made it the centre of every day of her life. No day started without her prayer time and her Bible reading. Fasting before receiving communion and making sure she got to Church at least twice a week were the bedrock of a hugely disciplined spiritual life. And when she said she was praying for you, it wasn't some polite throwaway line: she meant it. And her trust in God's love and providential care was absolute.**

**As we will hear tomorrow, she achieved a huge amount -as a nurse as a mother, as a barrister and as a friend to so many. No wonder there will be a real fuss made of her when her body is finally taken back to Sierra Leone and is laid in state before a big funeral in St George's Cathedral, Freetown. She loved her home country and so many of them loved her.**

**But despite the humble home she kept here in Isleden House, not for one minute did she lose her dignity or her sense of purpose. Whatever she didn't have, was of very little importance to her. What kept her head held high was the knowledge that she had run the race for Christ to the very best of her ability. So many people who have left the parish, on hearing of her tragic death, have emailed me to say what a wonderful friend she was to them in their years at St James'. With warmth and determination she exuded that wonderful, calm confidence that only faith can truly impart. She expressed in the best possible way the words of John Henry Newman, Anglican parish priest and Roman Catholic cardinal, who wrote:**

***God has created me to do to him some definite service. He has committed some work to me that he has not committed to another. Therefore I will trust him; whatever I am, I can never be thrown away. If I am in sickness, my sickness may serve him. If I am in sorrow my sorrow may serve him. He does nothing in vain. He knows what he is about. He may take away my friends. He may throw me among strangers. He may make me feel desolate, make my spirits sink, hide my future from me. Still he know what he is about.***

**So thank you, Beatrice for teaching us these things so generously. Thank you for your unstinting love of this Church and all its people, your love of the Eucharist and your unstinting prayers for all that we are doing. Thank you for your sense of humour and for your courage and willingness to stoically manage without help. Thank you for being our 'wise woman'.**

**And most of all thank you for revealing what the Christian life can offer to those who are willing - like you - to take up their cross and follow Jesus.**