

ST JAMES' CHURCH, KING STREET, SYDNEY

**HOMILY AT THE FUNERAL OF  
KAY McDONALD**

9 June 2022

The Reverend Andrew Sempell,  
*Rector of St James*

**Readings:** 1 Corinthians 15: 51-58 & John 14: 1-6

It was only a year ago that we gathered to give thanks for the life of Fr John McDonald, and now we come to do likewise for his wife Kay. She and John have been greatly loved members of this church and have contributed to it in numerous ways. As we gather, we bring our good memories of both Kay and John and cherish them as we give thanks for Kay's life.

We also remind ourselves of the things that were significant to Kay, not least of which was her Christian faith, which guided her through life, giving her confidence about her place in the world and hope for future.

So while we celebrate Kay's life, it is also a good time to pause and reflect upon our own faith and how it shapes us. Here we are confronted with some important human themes, such as: the mystery of life and death; the nature of God and humanity; and the meaning, purpose, and direction of existence - to name but a few.

**Kay's Life and Ministry**

Being the spouse of an ordained minister has both its joys and challenges. In earlier times, a 'clergy wife' was expected to be a full-time partner in ministry – although unpaid. It was a role that involved administration, hospitality, pastoral care, teaching Sunday School, flower-arranging, brass cleaning, and possibly running a Bible study, a soup kitchen, and leading a group such as the Mothers Union.

There were, and still are, many unwritten expectations of the clergy spouse that created an overlay on the appointment of their partner to a particular ministry. All this with the other duties of raising a family, managing a household, and pursuing any personal interests that time might afford. This was the world of Kay McDonald.

Her early years included active participation in church life with her family in Mortdale, and it was through a church activity that she met John. They were married in 1959 and moved several times before settling at St Basil's Artarmon for 30 years.

What came to the fore in Kay's ministry was her openness and gregariousness. She loved people more than 'correct' theology or arcane church practices and developed networks through hospitality and pastoral care. It remained her *modus operandi* throughout life.

In all of this, Kay had a confident Christian faith, grounded in her relationship with God through Christ – a relationship that grew and flourished over the course of her life, even to her death.

### **Life as a Process of Transformation**

We can understand life and death through the cycles of the seasons; we experience it in our own bodies as we grow and change - both through the replacement of the cells that give us our physicality as well as through the changing thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves and those around us. It is self-evident that we change!

Life, death, and rebirth are to be observed in the activities of creation and nature, just as they are to be discovered in the narrative about God's acting to overcome human brokenness and estrangement to bring about new life with meaning and purpose. At its heart, the Christian faith is relational and transformational.

Our attitudes about life prepare us for death because the spiritual journey touches every aspect of life. It is not only concerned with religious beliefs and practices but is more importantly about willingly participating in the process of life-long change; that is spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

Spiritual growth also requires us to be honest about ourselves, admitting our fears and failings, and seeking to change those aspects of our lives that weaken or diminish us. Such honesty gives us the power to change and become the people that God wants us to be. So what should we be?

Today's reading from John's Gospel reminds us that our purpose is to live our lives connected with God. It also tells us that we are loved by God and that there is a place for us in God's world. Despite adversity; despite betrayal or rejection; despite illness; despite doubt; despite our bad decisions, imperfections, and sin; God loves us and welcomes us – even if the world would disregard us or send us away.

Life needs to be seized and lived to the full if we are to learn its mysteries. Although we may not know the ultimate destination of this process, we nevertheless are given glimpses of it through the story of the people of God and in the person of Jesus – who was a human being like us, yet one who was full of God's Spirit of love such that we could only understand him to be God present in humanity.

## Confidence in Christ

This spiritual journey of transformation through relationships was evident in Kay's life; such as, her loving and accepting attitudes toward people, her self-giving actions through hospitality and care, her humility and kindness, and her quiet but firm faith. In the end, she died at peace and with confidence of one who has been a good and faithful servant.

The story of the death and resurrection of Jesus is a narrative about the resolution of the great dilemma of life that helps us to understand that death need not be feared. Our hope therefore is that resurrection comes to all that seek it, both in our daily lives and at our end.

St Paul wrote to the Christians in Corinth:

*“Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For this perishable body must put on imperishability, and this mortal body must put on immortality.”*

(1 Corinthians 15: 51-58)

This is a message of hope that encourages people to not fear death because the resurrection that happened to Jesus is to come to all of us. It was a vital part of Kay's life that is shared with us today.

May Kay rest in peace and rise in glory!