

Address for the funeral of Bishop John Waine, St Edmundsbury Cathedral: 21 January 2021

“In Him was life, and that life was the light of human kind.” (John chapter 1, verse 4)

The opening words of St John’s Gospel have been called the preface to the greatest of all stories: the overture to the symphony of the whole Gospel: the introduction to the central fact of history: the foreword to the Living Word.

At its core is the astonishing claim that in Jesus the light and life of God became **personal**, someone we could see and touch and experience in our friendships and families, in our hopes and fears, our longings and laughter and our loved ones. Because of that , every human life is a mirror to God’s life, of infinite value and destined for eternal life with God. That conviction animated and shaped John’s Waine’s life. It is for that light and life refracted in countless ways in John’s life that we give thanks today. And it is that hope that we shall commend him to God’s eternal keeping in this service.

Our remembering and thanks giving takes place in the company of countless others, friends here in Suffolk, in Essex, around the country and around the world, as well as in communion with those we have known and loved and who have gone before us. All of them, like us, were touched and changed by the alchemy of talent and gift which marked out John as an exceptional person. It is by their prayers and presence that we are sustained today.

“In Him was life”. Imagine for a moment this scene: a warm August day at Lord’s cricket ground in the evening of John’s years. Surrounded by close friends and fortified by lunch prepared by Pat, complemented by a good bottle of red wine, John spontaneously engages complete strangers in lively conversation. By the end of the day a dozen or more spectators have joined an impromptu party

animated by John's wit and charm and the tide of warmth which flowed out of him. This quality of his character evoked in all of us the deepest affection but also respect and loyalty and gratitude.

John had an exceptional gift for making friends, often disarmingly unimpressed by the fame or reputation of others. One night after a grand dinner at his Glass Sellers Livery Company he repaired to his Club with his son Ian. On finding the bar was closing, John was met by an American who had persuaded the manager to open up and invited John to join him for a nightcap. After two hours of animated conversation with a stranger who introduced himself as Harrison Ford, John (unaware of the Oscar winning fame of his new found friend) replied "my name is John Waine" and was astonished to hear the response "wait 'til I tell my friends in LA who I've met this evening!" It fell to Ian at breakfast next morning to explain that he had been drinking whisky with the star of the Raiders of the Lost Ark!

John's natural poise, his sparkle, wit, appreciation of good company and a love of friendship was combined with a deep wisdom, a natural authority and an exceptional gift for inspiring loyalty in others. These things marked him out inevitably for leadership since his vision for what the church could be was both wide and deep. It seemed as if (like the mitre on his coffin) the role of Bishop was made to measure for him. This address cannot possibly do justice to the whole story of such a long and varied life so we must look instead at snapshots. Snapshots of his time in this County where his leadership had an immediate impact, gathering the clergy and laity to mission rallies at Tattersalls at Newmarket Racecourse. Picture him leading coach loads of pilgrims via Felixtowe to Bruges, delighting in finding that on arrival the phalanx of buses were waived through the traffic by the local police. Or see in your mind's eye John as President of the Suffolk Show confidently escorting Princess Diana as Royal Patron around the parade ring. This County, this cathedral and the clergy here took him to their heart and knew that in John they had a Bishop who was a pastor, a priest, a friend and a leader.

The journey from Ipswich to Chelmsford in 1986 was a short one, but it threw John into one of the largest and most complex Dioceses facing the huge challenges of East London at a time when the Church of England was responding to the Faith in the City report. John's prayer for wisdom, contained in our Old Testament lesson today was read at his Enthronement Service in Chelmsford. That prayer was overwhelmingly answered. John visited the London boroughs regularly, taking tea in a high rise tower block in Waltham Forest, exploring the Dockland developments in Newham, meeting Local Authorities in Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge. John became convinced of the need and of the opportunities here and led an appeal to raise £2m towards a whole range of creative responses which the churches made to poverty and deprivation.

But John also recognised the needs and opportunities in the County of Essex where his unswerving dedication to the rural parishes is remembered today 25 years after leaving for retirement. He led conferences of all the clergy at the holiday camp at Caister-on-sea near Yarmouth where his humour and natural timing on stage was the perfect antidote to the gloomy setting of sea-side chalets out of season! Chelmsford Cathedral, like this one, will be a place of recollection and thanksgiving for his leadership and his gift for holding together a diocese which might have been in danger of fragmenting into separate areas.

The snapshots of this time are vivid for those of us who worked with John. His Staff Meetings were both great fun and hard work, always built around warm hospitality provided by Pat. Picture the Provost saying to me as a new Archdeacon: "you'll get an excellent lunch so I always leave the tricky items until the afternoon!" Picture John gathering some 500 clergy at the Cathedral each Maundy Thursday, leading them out to the Chapter House to look them in the eye and say: "I shall be praying for you as you administer the Easter Sacraments this weekend." He had enormous respect for the clergy and used to say to us, "the acid test of my visits to the parishes is whether the parish priest's ministry is

easier when I've gone." Picture his deep partnership and friendship with Bishop Thomas McMahon, his Catholic opposite number in the Brentwood Diocese, and their ecumenical pilgrimage together to Taizé. Both of them were delighted to sit there in the summer shade talking to young people from all over the world. Picture his visits to Kenya and the deep affection and respect between John and the Archbishop.

John's leadership through all this was deceptively skilful. He gave his colleagues scope and encouragement, but the direction was clear and the authority enabling but never authoritarian.

Confident in his role, he was always ready to give colleagues space to be themselves while catching a glimpse of the larger vision which drove him forward. Although he was cautious about the process during the great debates about the ordination of women to the priesthood, he was always personally supportive, encouraging and delighting in the ministry of women in his Diocese. Alongside all his Diocesan responsibilities came many national roles, especially as Clerk to the Closet in the Royal Household, a role for which Her Majesty has expressed deep appreciation to Pat.

Retirement in 1996 was not the closing of this picture book, but the opening of new pages. Someone with John's experience and continuing energy and easy way of moving between different worlds led to him being repeatedly invited to take the lead in so many different roles where his capacity for giving clear direction, combined with an easy charm and sometimes wicked humour was always sought after. He became Chair of Essex University Council, a much loved Master of the Glass Sellers Livery Company, a member of the Press Complaints Commission and President of Nobody's Friends Dining Club. After dinner speakers were welcomed, amused and left in no doubt that the President's approval was entirely dependent on their brevity! Becoming Prelate of the Order of St John gave him special pleasure.

Picture his delight in his journeys around the world visiting the Order in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong and South Africa. The memory of his visits is alive and vivid to those who met him then, who journeyed with him, and who felt he understood and embodied the values of the Order. Picture him too

responding to the appetite for travel and for new places and friendships which gave him such joy on the cruises he made in his final years. Picture his joy too in the victories and his pain in the defeats of his beloved Ipswich Town.

This is partly a glittering story of a life in the limelight with many winning ways and a deep commitment to his Lord and his Church. Although his was to be a major national responsibility in the Church he never lost awareness of his roots in Prescott and his love for Liverpool.

Yet so much more is inevitably hidden from our gaze. His huge and deep dependence on Pat who in countless ways responded to the demands which such a versatile public life imposed on the whole family. His pride in and loyalty to his sons. His pleasure and delight in all the Grandchildren. His deep desire that they should all flourish and prosper and his commitment to helping in so many different ways. Family life is rarely straightforward and was sometimes challenged by John's habit of consulting contacts whenever taking the family on caravan holidays. On one such trip to Belgium it led to invitations to stay in Religious Houses where the boys were kept awake by mosquito bites and bells ringing while John was escorted to a comfortable guest house. It led to a breakfast showdown – no more monasteries on this holiday thank you very much!

Retirement in Suffolk villages saw a quieter, faithful and much loved ministry, taking his turn as a member of the team to officiate at early Communion services. When an organist couldn't be found, John would play, preach and preside, walking the length of the church to the organ between the hymns. A leg injury led to him presiding sitting down on one occasion. "You may occasionally see a Bishop at a bar stool", said John, "but a Bishop at a bar stool behind an altar is a very rare sight." For his 90th birthday, the affection in which the villages held him led to an impromptu lockdown party on the doorstep with birthday cake and representatives from all nine parishes to serenade him.

John died as he lived – still committed to his Lord, his service of his church, his communities, his family and his friends. The final weeks in hospital were painful for him and for Pat. His last phone call with me just before he was readmitted to hospital in the days before Christmas was entirely without self-pity and full of interest in and enquiry about my life. As the call ended I remember feeling cheered and encouraged by him. I felt that in John the light was indeed shining in the darkness and the darkness had not mastered it. Today our memory of him can be the light in our darkness too.

Perhaps it is fitting that he died in the Christmas season. It brought an end to a long life which was enriching for so many people because it was fed by a love for people and a profound belief in the value and purpose of all human life. It was not principally doctrine nor dogma which drove him, but a vision for the Gospel and the Church of England at the heart of human society. A church which was confident, courageous, generous and inclusive. A church which feared not for itself but which attracted others by its liveliness, its affection and its fun. Under John's leadership the church was indeed the place in which the Word became flesh, made his home among us and in which (through its liturgy and service) we can see glory, such glory as befits the Father's only Son, full of grace and truth.

At his 90th birthday, as the villagers stood at his doorstep, John had asked if it might be possible for them to sing the hymn: "Soul of my Saviour" which will be sung as we take communion. The final words may be our prayer for him as we lay him to rest today:

Guard and defend him from the foe malign,
in death's dread moments make him only thine;
call him and bid him come to thee on high
where he may praise thee with thy saints for ay.

May he rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen