

Dear Friend

I can't believe it snowed this morning! In the Bible, snow is an image of purity: "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall as white as snow". Isaiah 1.18. Or as King David put it in Psalm 51.7: "...wash me and I will be whiter than snow." Nothing, of course, can be whiter than snow, but you get the idea! Forgiveness covers our sins in the same way as a blanket of snow covers the ground.

As we remember HRH The Duke of Edinburgh during this week of national mourning, let us be grateful for his extraordinary life, which we have discovered much more about over the last few days, and keep Her Majesty the Queen at the forefront of our prayers.

In stark contrast to the whiteness of snow, black is our official colour of mourning, (although in Chinese culture white is the mourning colour). As many people will be wearing something black as a symbol of mourning, as God's people we are clothed inwardly in the righteousness of Christ, which is pictured as white robes. Death is the great leveller. Queens and Commoners, Princes and Paupers will all stand before the crucified and risen Lord who will judge us all - a judgment not based on our status, qualifications or achievements but on our character and our faith in our Creating and Redeeming God. Only God can see into our hearts - the innermost workings of our lives. And although his gaze is as a searchlight, exposing everything to his light, he sees us through eyes that are full of grace and mercy. Christians see death not as something to be avoided and feared, but as simply part of our journey into the heart of God. The thought of the Lord himself coming and taking Prince Philip by the hand and bringing him home, is one that fills us, and I am sure his family, with comfort and peace.

As we continue to celebrate the miracle of the resurrection during these weeks of Easter, let us keep in our hearts and minds the many wonderful promises that we have in our risen Lord. Here are some verses to reflect on during the course of this week:

'Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?
Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

I Corinthians 15.51-57.

The greatest thing about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is that we have a share in it. We share in the cross, by denying ourselves, and seeking to make God's will our will, as Jesus did. And we share in the empty tomb as we know that we have been made alive together with Christ, and we will live for evermore, as Jesus does.

So let us pray for the Queen and all the Royal Family, that as they grieve, they will do so in the sure and certain hope that Christ is risen from the dead and that the pain of parting will one day be caught up in rejoicing, as we will be reunited with all the saints in light and in glory forever.

With much love and prayer

Simon