

Service of Thanksgiving for the life of David Cook

Introduction:

Marion, just last Tuesday morning as we sat together with David, do you recall our conversation re the photo.

In David's room there was a delightful old b & w photo on the wall of a young boy – just eight years of age – sitting atop a heavily laden trailer attached to a car. The boy is perched on a tightly drawn tarpaulin his feet dangling over the side of the bulging load.

It's a dry dusty day and in the background is a wide open plain reaching into the distance under the bright glare of the sun. Two other people neatly dressed – man in coat and tie – are also present, standing by their car, having come to see the travelers off.

The boy perched on the trailer, staring straight at the camera, is David Cook. The year is 1939 and the Cook family are about to depart from Mt Barker in South Australia to begin the long journey to Canberra and a new life in the national capital.

As I studied the photo I couldn't help wondering what eight years old David may have been thinking or feeling at that time. Could he have imagined that some 74 years later at his side would be Marion gently tending to his needs, at that moment nursing all the memories they had accumulated on their journey through life together.

Life is a journey, and what a wonderful metaphor that photo is for David's life. It reminded me of Dr Seuss' children's book "O the places you'll go" in which Seuss writes about life as 'an exciting journey' in a playful and lyrical way that children can easily understand.

*"You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself any direction you choose.
You're on your own. And you know what you know.
And YOU are the one who'll decide where to go..."*
*Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting,
So... get on your way!"*

And the eight years old boy atop the trailer certainly did get on his way, with the mountains awaiting him including the highlands of New Guinea and the ice capped Himalayas. His love of the great outdoors, combined with work, would also take him to the Antarctic, and flying through the clouds as a licensed pilot. It would have him singing, bushwalking and cycling, embracing the moment with Marion and family in so many different places and corners of the world.

Life is a journey and David Cook embraced it as such. We therefore have much to give thanks for and celebrate as we gather this morning.

But, paradoxically, when someone is so full of being and doing as David was, it only heightens our sense of sadness and loss when that spirit of adventure and engagement is lost from us.

And so, Marion and family, whilst we have come to give thanks for David's life, we are also here to offer you our prayers, our encouragement and support. And as members of Christian community we have the words of our faith and the encouragement and affirmation of one another around us to affirm for you. So then, let us then hear words of Scripture so that we may all face the future with hope:

The evangelist John said:

"God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence" on the days that lie ahead.

1 John 4:16

Reflection: David was open to the sacred touch in his life and the world

I draw your attention to the prayer printed in the order of service. Over the last few days as I reflected on David's life, the words of this prayer I have known for a number of years came to me.

*Eternal God,
your touch makes this world holy.
Open our eyes to see your hand at work
in the splendour of creation,
and in the beauty of human life.
Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us,
to share your blessings with our sisters and brothers,
and to experience the joy of life in your presence.
We ask this through Christ our Lord Amen*

Earlier this morning I referred to conversations had with David in recent years which I really came to value and enjoy.

I know David was not an overtly religious person in terms of the institutional church, but I truly believe he was religious to the extent that he was able to appreciate, as expressed in this prayer, the touch of the sacred *in the splendour of creation, and in the beauty of human life.*

I mentioned earlier how I felt appreciated and valued when in conversation with David. For here was a person open to the splendour of creation in the verdant vibrant rainforests of the Owen Stanley Ranges or frozen waters of the Antarctic teeming with life, and therefore also able to see beauty in human life; the people encountered in his life and relationships.

Fiona/Susan I'm not sure which one of you commented in our time together last Wednesday, how your Dad was someone who always sought to see the good in people; of how if someone was being criticised in conversation by another, your Dad would chime in with a comment such as: "yes, but we need to remember they've had to deal with some testing

times in life....and so on” David sought to see the positive in life, as something to be lived and valued, and other people as gifts to be cherished.

And so we come to the parable read for us a few minutes ago by Caitlin. I’m fairly certain it’s the first time I’ve used it in the context of a funeral or thanksgiving service, but it has something to say to us today, I believe, about David and the nature of life.

And Jesus said, “To what should I compare the kingdom of God? It is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

It’s an intriguing metaphor for the kingdom of God but also for life generally. One interpretation of the parable is the dough – as our world if you like – remains simply a lump until it is leavened by the yeast, a metaphor for the Spirit of Christ.

Let me suggest to you that in his appreciation for the splendour of creation and the beauty of human life, David in a sense became the leaven in the lump, the yeast that caused the dough to rise in the lives of those who came to know him as a father, Pop, friend, work colleague, or life partner, Marion. David’s own openness to life and to others became a source of inspiration for others in their own lives and relationships.

And so we come to the second stanza in the prayer:

*Help us to cherish the gifts that surround us,
to share your blessings with our sisters and brothers,
and to experience the joy of life in your presence.*

As David understood, it is not sufficient to delight in creation and the abundant life we have been given but to share these blessings with others so that they too they may experience the joy of life.

David did not embrace formalised religion but I sense, know I believe, did touch the sacred in his openness to life and those around him and communicated to others something of that eternal mystery that I believe pervades all life and all creation.

Let us then give thanks and cherish all that is beautiful and all that is meaningful in the world around us and in our personal relationships, but especially this day cherish the gift of David Cook and how his example and response to life, offered an experience of the sacred and helped shape and inform our own response to life. Amen.