



Diane Louise Heath, Priest

**Mass of the Resurrection
St David's Church Applecross
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Ecclesiastes 3:1-11; Psalm 139:1-12; John 6:47-52

The image of Diane I have in mind comes from my first Easter at Joondalup. For twenty years I had performed the Maundy Thursday foot-washing in the traditional way – on a raised sanctuary, kneeling down to wash the feet of twelve invited women and men and children. In a carpeted worship space where everyone is on one level, however, this was never going to work, so we settled on something much less formal where everyone was involved. I wasn't at all sure that people would take to it, however, and more than a little concerned that we might seriously frighten some of the horses. Foot-washing, after all, is an oddly intimate experience for contemporary Australians, and many run a mile rather than allow themselves to feel so defenceless. I need not have worried, of course, for Diane was first on her feet, taking hold of a red washbowl and a bath towel, plonking herself down on the carpet and getting on with the job, as matter-of-factly as you like, as if it was the most natural thing in the world. After this, and largely as a result of this, it all just happened because Diane's forthrightness and tenderness touched everyone, drawing us more deeply into the forthrightness and tenderness of Christ.

One way or another, it seems, this is what Diane always did, and it certainly didn't start when she was ordained at the age of sixty; it had become part of her long before. Diane's priesting simply released and fanned into flame an inner graciousness which could now be exercised not just by Diane the baptised Christian, not just by an individual disciple, but exercised by the Church through her as the Church's authorised minister, as a walking sacrament of Jesus Christ. In other words, ordination recognised and ratified what had been growing for years and years and years, making the riches of Diane's aliveness more widely available in blessing and healing for the world.

Diane mothered us in the best sense of the word, for she always and only wanted Christ's children to grow to maturity, taking adult responsibility as fully-fledged collaborators rather than infantile dependents or mere followers.

More importantly, she mothered us by reflecting God's own nurturing, by patiently exercising God's gentleness among us, while at the same time embodying the tough Love which first loves us, the endlessly resilient Love which never lets us go, the kindly Light which leads us on our journey. Like John the Baptist, Diane came among us as the Lord's fore-runner, preparing the Lord's way in the desert, always pointing beyond herself to the One who stands among us unrecognised, the coming One who alone can save us from ourselves. Like him, she called us to repentance, and calls us still to that deep-down change of heart, that deep-down change of direction, so that in every moment we are turning as she did all her days to Christ. She came among us in this way and she left us in the same way.

In little over six weeks from diagnosis to death Diane faced the hard truth with courage, getting on with what needed to be done, demonstrating - naturally and unobtrusively and without needing to draw attention to herself - the depth of her trust in the One who called her, the One she served so well. She didn't want to die, but she made the most of this short time, tidying up her affairs, saying her goodbyes, planning her funeral, choosing the scriptures we have heard and the hymns we are singing today, receiving the sacraments of the church, and making what we used to call a good death. To die with the words 'I love ...' on your lips really says it all, but better than dying with 'I love ...' as an epitaph is to have lived lovingly and fully and extravagantly and joyously, and this is the real reason we are here in such numbers to celebrate and give thanks by making Eucharist together – for Diane never let us forget that life, for all its pain, is the greatest gift, and God's world, for all its sorrow, is a most wonderful place of beauty and laughter and fun and fulfilment.

I've just started reading *Afterwords: the Post-Prime Ministerial Speeches* of Paul Keating, and two sayings stand out. In the end, everyone gets carried out, Keating tells us, and the only question is whether the pall bearers are crying. He also quotes Winston Churchill's remark to his great friend Violet Bonham-Carter: 'We all end up as worms but, you know, I hope I'm a glow worm.' Well, Diane, you are undoubtedly a glow worm, and, yes, we are in tears. At every turn you unfailingly shared with us the bread of life: pray for us now before the throne of grace, as we pray for you, that the circle of love may be complete.

