

Cell / Small Group Outlines – Sunday 11th October

Fullness of Life

Overview

On Thursday 8th September, we were informed of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. The world's longest reigning monarch, a woman of great faith, a wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. For people across the globe, the news brought a whole raft of feelings. For many, a sense of loss of a leader they had long admired, for others a reminder of periods of personal grief and loss. For all of us under 70, it is an unfamiliar event, having only ever known this Queen as our head of state. There will also be confusion about how we should best respond to this news – individually and collectively with some leaning into the period of national mourning and with others baffled or uneasy about this outpouring of grief for someone they didn't know.

With all of that in mind, we have sought to produce material that makes room for all those emotions and creates space to reflect and celebrate a life well-lived, talk about grief and loss and consider what experiencing “life in all its fullness” means in our everyday. We have provided activities that are specifically focussed around the death of Queen Elizabeth II but also activities that create space to reflect on our emotions generally, honouring memories and navigating difficult times. Please feel free to mix and match to create the session most appropriate for your young people.

Any text in italics represents notes for the leader. It gives more context around the scripture/activity. You may choose to share verbatim, summarise or not share at all.

Welcome

You will know your young people best and have a sense of how to start this session. You may want to start by just creating space to chat about this week; How the news has impacted them and how they're feeling about it. If they haven't come in ready to talk, one of these activities may help.

Activity One: The Queen

Either bring or print a picture of the Queen (see Appendix 1). Alternatively, bring plain paper and have the group draw a picture of the Queen in the centre.

Around this picture, ask the group to write words they think of when they think of Queen Elizabeth II. If they're struggling to come up with anything, share some of the stories in appendix 2 and see what impression the conjure.

Activity Two: The Generation Game, Conveyor Belt Challenge

Collect some items large and small. The more varied and random the better. Don't forget to include a cuddly toy!

Gather your young people in teams of two. When playing this game, you will need to find a way of showing each item to the players and then taking it out of sight, as if on a conveyor belt passing before them. Maybe past a window, in the door, round the room and back out again. You can have some fun with this.

If time and space are an issue, a video version can be found here -

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WbRuo5jKkC8>

Each team then has one minute to recall and write down as many items as possible. A round of applause or a prize if you have one can go to the winning team.

Activity 3: Memories

Ask the group to share their first childhood memory. It is likely these will be varied – some funny, some sad, some vague and some super specific.

Our memories are powerful. They shape how we feel about ourselves, others and the world. At times of loss and change, naming memories can help us sort through our feelings, good and bad. They can inspire us, bring joy and laughter as well as creating space for tears and sadness. Sharing memories when grieving can help us gain a greater picture of life – the twists and turns, ups and downs. It can remind us that a full life is not just a 'happy' life and help us to embrace our own experiences and emotions.

Word

Together read Psalm 16 and then John 10:1-10

Ask: Can anyone identify what these two passages have in common?

Both passages talk about the difference between a life lived following false god's and a life lived following the one true God. The Psalmist (David) and John identify the fundamental difference between these different paths.

Ask: What do you think the difference is between the gods of those different paths? If needed, v5-6 of Psalm 16 (particularly The Message translation) and v2-3 of John might be helpful.

Psalm 16 speaks of a God that chooses us. It reminds us that God has chosen us as his heirs – an honour given to children – those that are loved and valued. In John, Jesus describes the role of a shepherd. A shepherd's job is to serve and protect their flock. Each sheep was precious and valued

and a shepherd would work tirelessly to make sure they were in a safe place to graze well and protected from predators. Both a parent and shepherd want the very best for those in their care.

Mountain top experiences

For many extreme adventurers, climbing Mount Everest – the highest summit in the world is the ultimate ambition. Those that make it are rewarded with extraordinary views, a huge sense of satisfaction and achievement and an incredible, envy-inducing story to tell. However, it is also incredibly risky. As you go to even moderate altitudes the air gets ‘thinner’. At around 5,500 metres there is half the amount of air that you would find at sea level. Despite there being less air, it is still made up of around 21% Oxygen, 75% Nitrogen and 3% (and rising) Carbon Dioxide (plus a small fraction of other gases). No one can survive for long on the top of the world. Not only is it inhabitable by humans, but there is also almost no life found there. Not even the hardiest of mosses and lichens! The summit can only be appreciated because the time there is limited. Most of life is found and lived in the valleys and on the way up and way down.

Ask: John and the Psalmist both talk about the misguidedness of following false gods or those that seem to offer something good that ultimately brings harm. In comparison, they show us that fullness of life (John 10:10) and fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). In light of the story shared, what do you think are some of the false god’s – things that promise happiness but ultimately don’t – are? And, what are some of the features of a ‘full’ life? It might help to think of people you think of as having lived a ‘full life’ – maybe a grandparent, an older member of your Church, a historical figure or even Queen Elizabeth II.

Some examples: Perhaps false God’s could include consumerism – the pursuit of ‘things’ in the hope they’ll bring us happiness? Spending too much time on any one thing – a hobby, our phones, gaming, watching tv looking for distractions from situations we’re finding sad or challenging?

A full life might include loving relationships, a sense of purpose, new adventures, learning.

A full life is a flowering garden.

Alexander John Shaia talks about the book of John as an exploration of joy – fullness of life. John uses story and poetic language to paint pictures of how Jesus’ coming to earth is an invitation to experience his light, hope and love in our every day. All of it. He suggests John points towards the analogy of a garden. His description below is wordy, but beautiful. You may find it helpful to share or just read yourself for your own understanding:

“John’s gospel is a vision that is simultaneously unitive and illuminative. There is absolutely nothing that can equal its inner experience. This feeling is precisely what poets and mystics try to describe and certainly one of the main reasons people use drugs and alcohol. They are trying to achieve an

encounter with this bliss. It is the pinnacle, the apogee, and the heart of all. When we relax and surrender to this epiphany, our attention gradually refocuses. Our perception expands and sharpens. We notice much more than the garden flowers and the warmth of the new embrace. We become aware of the expanding roots, leaves, buds, and blossoms—the foundation and the future. Time expands. We sense the past and realize that our garden also contains dirt and worms and the sere brown memories of last season's blooms. We feel the rhythm of its unceasing cycles of decay into beauty into decay into beauty. We feel the truth of this cycle stirring as we think of our lives. As powerful as our bliss feels it is only an instant, and the sense of epiphany is only one part of one path of a full journey, in the same way that blossoms are only one brief season of a garden. The treasure and essence of the third path is much more than a moment. It is an experience of union, of enfolding paradox. The third path's capacity to hold ambiguity means it can—and does—contain everything. It holds joy. It holds conflict. It holds boredom. It holds compassion. It holds cruelty. It holds ecstasy. It holds pain. It holds love. It holds cynicism. It holds hope. It holds misery. It holds striving. It holds hate. It holds peace. In it is every gradation of light and dark, of each day, and every passage of the seasons. It welcomes our full human complexity. It invites, accepts and celebrates each and every aspect of our human enigma."

Ask: Give each person a piece of paper and make sure you have colouring pens/pencils. Fold your piece of paper in half. Now imagine your life as a beautiful garden. The fullness of it representing your life. On the top half of your paper draw flowers, grass and trees that represent all the things that bring you joy. You could write some of the words these features make you feel.

When that is complete, open your piece of paper and draw those things that are happening underground, that may be dark and gnarly but are also part of the 'above ground experience.

For example – one of the flowers may represent a best friend. You might write happiness, trust, safety, fun as some of the feelings. The dark side may be a difficult break up that left you feeling vulnerable, sad and unlovable but you can recognise that it was because your friend was with you in that situation, that you learnt just how good a friend they were.

Important: None of this is to say that suffering is actually good, or that God sends bad things for us to learn from. Rather, it is to remind us that sadness is unavoidable, but that is never the whole story. Naming these things can help us learn, grow and discover deeper joy that can and does exist even in the hard times.

Worship

During this session we have spent time thinking about the power of memories and the features of a full life. This means giving space to remember those moments of sadness as well as happiness and challenge as well as success. We recognise that life is rarely just 'good' or 'bad' but that every moment and event has a mixture of everything and that that what makes us human.

Activity 1:

Together spend some time reflecting on the life and legacy of Queen Elizabeth II. If you have candles, you may want to invite young people to light a candle as they speak their prayer as a reminder of God's light in the darkness. Invite prayers for,

- Gratitude for her years of service and celebration of her faith in God
- Those who knew and loved the Queen as family or a friend – for comfort in their grief
- Those who will feel the loss of the Queen as their monarch and leader
- Those who have been reminded of their own loss of loved ones and grief
- For King Charles III – that he'll lead with wisdom, humility and kindness

You may also want to ask them to name some of the characteristics they most admired in the Queen and pray that we'll learn from her example.

If you are struggling for words or want to build this time of reflection, there are some suggested prayers in appendix 3.

Activity 2:

While we have learned how every emotion and experience has value, when we are in the midst of difficult times, it is important we create time and space to name that pain and seek comfort. Your young people may want to name some of the challenges they're facing right now so if appropriate, you could give space here for them to do that.

Then, listen to this song as you pray silently for yourselves and one another.

Keep Holding On, by Eddie Kirkland

<https://open.spotify.com/track/2U8F6lJrPSvy8cwt3R6c2F> or
<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=AQLqIWMCj-g&feature=share>

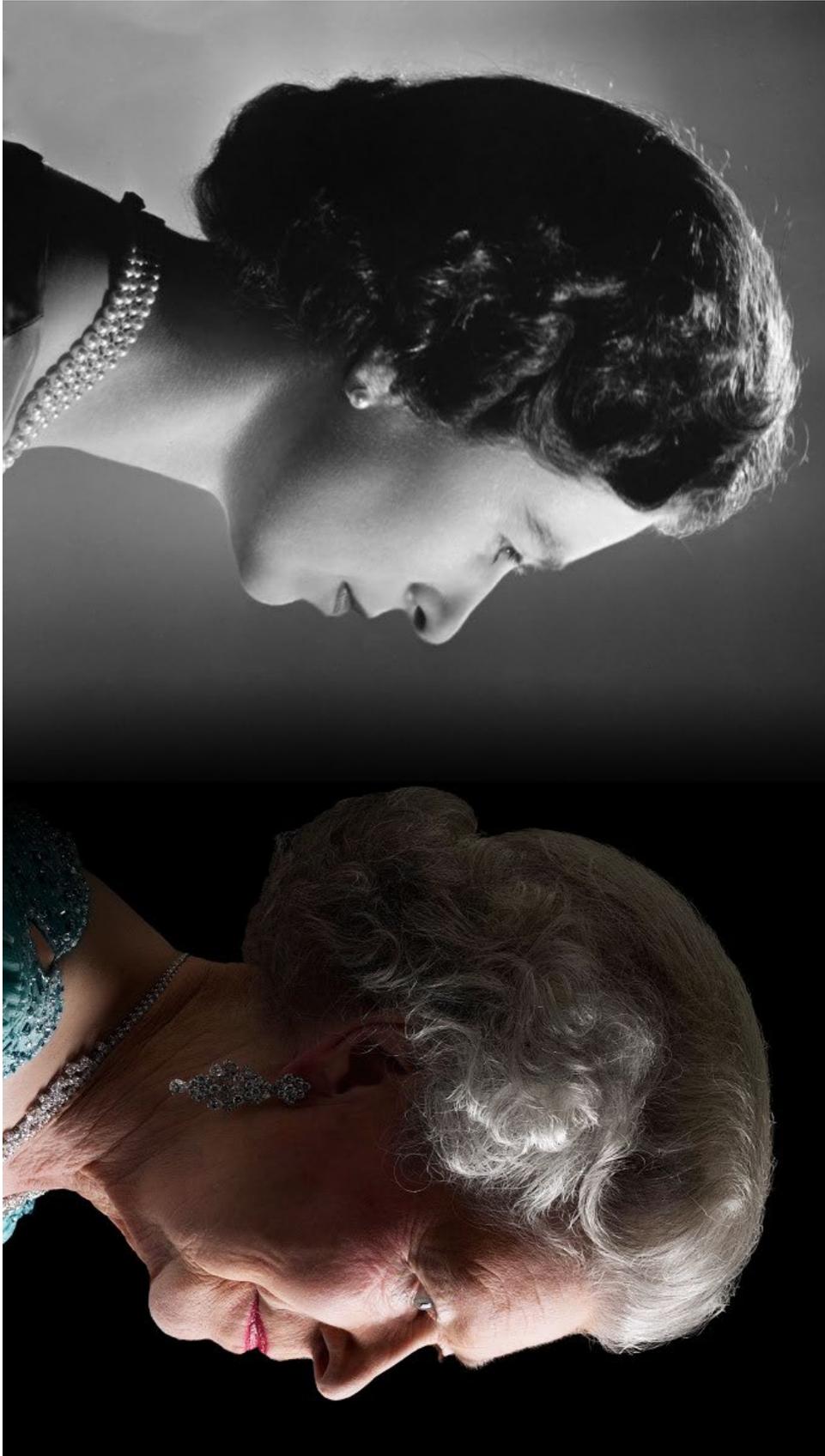
Witness

Legacies

How do you want to be remembered? While it can seem morbid to think about our own funerals and the eulogies we hope will be spoken, we should remember that the words spoken reflect the whole of our lives, not just the end. We will also be spoken of and remembered many times during our lives. So, how do you want to be remembered? What do you want people to say about you?

Ask the young people to write one word on a piece of paper that they would most like to be used to describe them. When this is done, ask them to think of one action they can take this week that reflects that word. You may want to share these so you can support one another in following through!

Appendix 1:



Appendix 2:

Quotes:

'I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong. But I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join it with me, as I now invite you to do: I know that your support will be unfailingly given. God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share it.' (21st birthday radio address, 1947)

'I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God!' (2002)

'To many of us our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example.' (2000)

'For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none.' (2014)

Stories

1. At Highclere, better known as Downton Abbey, a farm worker was wedged under a broken-down trailer when he heard a familiar voice asking, 'Can I help?' It was the Queen, in a headscarf, out walking with a dog. She is one of those guests who wants to make a contribution.
2. After lunch, the Queen had asked her royal guest whether he would like a tour of the estate. Prompted by his foreign minister the urbane Prince Saud, an initially hesitant Abdullah had agreed. The royal Land Rovers were drawn up in front of the castle. As instructed, the Crown Prince climbed into the front seat of the front Land Rover, his interpreter in the seat behind.

But then, a surprising twist! The queen herself was Abdullah's driver:

To his surprise, the Queen climbed into the driving seat, turned the ignition and drove off. Women are not — yet — allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia, and Abdullah was not used to being driven by a woman, let alone a queen.

And she wasn't just driving, she was DRIVING, leaving Abdullah a quivering wreck:

His nervousness only increased as the Queen, an Army driver in wartime, accelerated the Land Rover along the narrow Scottish estate roads, talking all the time. Through his

interpreter, the Crown Prince implored the Queen to slow down and concentrate on the road ahead.

That's right: Queen Elizabeth basically spent an afternoon using her military-grade driving skills to haze the crown prince of Saudi Arabia.

3. On June 7, Elizabeth and Philip rode in the Gold State Coach from Buckingham Palace to St. Paul's Cathedral to officially celebrate her 25th year on the throne. Wearing a bright pink outfit, including a hat decked out with 25 fabric bells, the queen repeated her long-ago pledge to devote her life to service, saying that "Although that vow was made in my salad days when I was green in judgement, I do not regret nor retract one word of it."

4. Princess Elizabeth never attended a public or private school, and she doesn't have a college degree—in fact, one of the facts you didn't know about the British royal family is that Elizabeth's grandson, Prince William, was the first royal not to start their education at the palace. But Elizabeth still got an education from her tutors at home. "Queen Elizabeth was home-schooled as was normal for a princess at that time," McMahon says. "The Vice-Provost of Eton College, Henry Marten, taught Elizabeth constitutional history to prepare her for the future role as monarch. He guided his young charge on both the powers and limitations of being a modern queen." She also had the Archbishop of Canterbury as a religion teacher, and became fluent in French, which she learned from her French and Belgian governesses. This skill later helped her as monarch in communicating with other world leaders. She also studied art and music and became a champion swimmer.

5. "Famously, she [Queen Elizabeth] joined the Auxiliary Territorial Services during World War II doing her bit to raise morale during the Blitz," McMahon says. She signed up when she turned 18 in 1944 and worked as a mechanic and truck driver. Her service makes her the only current living head of state to have served in World War II, and the only female member of the royal family to have entered the military.
Amazingly, Elizabeth's ATS uniform allowed the princess to go incognito on the streets of London with her sister, Margaret, on Victory in Europe (VE) Day, May 8, 1945. She recorded her memories of the night for the BBC in 1985: "I remember we were terrified of being recognized, so I pulled my uniform cap well down over my eyes," Elizabeth said. "We cheered the king and queen on the balcony [of Buckingham Palace] and then walked miles through the street. I remember lines of unknown people linking arms and walking down Whitehall, all of us just swept along on a tide of happiness and relief...I think it was one of the most memorable nights of my life."

Appendix 3: Prayers to share

In time of light, in time of darkness,
We gather in this place.
Seeking the solace of faith,
And to be found by the mercy of the living God.

With tears and with laughter,
With the memories of the long years,
On this day we share that which is good
And that which brings us comfort and hope.

Amen

Hear our thanks for Elizabeth, our late Queen,
Blessed by grace,
Resolute in service,
Modest in person.
For the years of her reign,
And the sweep of history through which she provided
Both anchor and springboard.
We thank You for her dedication to this nation and Commonwealth,
And for all the rich gifts of wisdom, kindness and inclusion
She brought to her long decades.

We give You thanks for lives her life touched,

For the radiance of her smile
And the encouragement of her words.
We thank You for the sparkle of her humour
That eased the tensions she encountered,
And for the determination of her life
To see its duties through.

King of kings and Lord of lords,
We thank You for the families she united
Through her person.
Those near and dear to her in her home life;
Those brought together by the union of this kingdom;
Those spread throughout the Commonwealth of nations
So dear to her heart.

For our nation at this time we pray,
Asking for comfort in our loss,
And hopefulness as we step forward into the days ahead.
As our thankfulness mingles with our sadness,
May we support each other
And be, together, communities of tenderness and kindness.
Sustain us with the strong memories of the past,
And prepare us for joyfulness in the days before us.

In the dignity of our time of grief,

May we find in each other encouragement
To share our tears, and be consoled by remembering laughter
That eases emptiness and speaks to us
Of life continuing in generations to come.

God save our King,
And bless him in these days of preparation.
Imbue him with the strength of character,
The openness of heart,
The suppleness of mind
And the generosity of spirit
That will anoint him in the coming days.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

A prayer to use with children
God, Our Father,
all through our country,
we are sad at this time,
because our Queen is no longer with us.

She will be missed by so very many,
but we know that you are looking after her.
Bless those close to her.

May they know they are remembered by us.

And bless our country at this time of change.

May we all work together as one family,

and be ready to serve others,

as our Queen served us.

In Jesus' name we ask it.

Amen.

From <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/worship/prayers-and-worship-material-for-use-following-the-death-of-the-queen#secondset>