

ST JAMES' CHURCH, KING STREET, SYDNEY

**SERMON AT THE FUNERAL SERVICE FOR  
SIR NICHOLAS SHEHADIE**

**21 February 2018**

The Reverend Andrew Sempell,  
*Rector of St James'*

**Readings:** Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8; 1 Corinthians 13: 1-7; John 14: 1-7.

Nicholas Michael Shehadie was the member of a significant clerical family within the Antiochean Orthodox Church that reflected his Lebanese heritage and a reason for his growing up in the Sydney suburb of Redfern where his father's church was located. These foundational experiences shaped his life.

Nick Shehadie was also a great story teller – often telling them against himself. In the past seven years, since moving to Sydney, he and I would often find ourselves sitting at the back of events while his wife Marie officiated as Governor. On these occasions I was entertained by his yarns - many of which arose from his experiences while playing rugby.

One that comes to mind concerned a much lesser known rugby player but better-known bishop in the Anglican Church, the Late Brian King. Brian had been Rector of the parish in which I grew up. He had always been a committed Christian, including those moments when he enjoyed the 'game they play in heaven'.

As many of you would be aware, there can sometimes be a bit of bawdy singing in the change-rooms after a match, including some pressure for all to join in. Nick Shehadie told me that on one of these occasions a few of the fellows had pushed Brian into singing a song for them to which he responded, by singing with great gusto, 'Jesus loves me this I know'. It was not quite expected, (perhaps there was shock) but it was an indicator of his honesty, in that he could participate but not waver from his own moral position. Shehadie said that he was impressed by King's courage and integrity.

### **Integrity**

Integrity is about wholeness and requires a person to understand themselves, their values, and then live it out in their daily lives. It can have a spiritual dimension to it, because it recognises that we are part of something bigger than ourselves (be it humanity, nature, or God) and that we have a responsibility to seek the common good.

*"To everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:  
a time to be born and a time to die..."* (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-2)

I can't but help remembering the popular 1960's song 'Do everything, turn, turn, turn. There is a season, turn, turn, turn.' It was sung by the Birds (and later the Seekers) and it brought these words to life – for 'there is a time for every purpose under heaven...'

We can understand life and death through the cycles of the seasons; we experience it in our own bodies as we grow and change - both through the replacement of the cells that give us our physicality as well as through the changing thoughts and feelings we have about ourselves and those around us. Part of the mystery is that we grow and change, physically replacing ourselves several times over a long life, yet we nevertheless remain the same person.

Life, death and rebirth are to be observed in the activities of creation and are part of the integrity of nature; but we don't have to be fatalistic about it. The Christian view is that these cycles are also about transformation, and is revealed in the narrative about God's acting to restore humanity from brokenness and estrangement to new life with meaning and purpose. This becomes part of our spiritual integrity, as we admit our fears and failings and seek to change those aspects of our lives that weaken or diminish us.

I invite you to hold the idea of 'integrity' in your minds as we move on.

### **Inclusiveness**

The Gospel reading suggests that there are 'many mansions (or dwelling places) in God's world. It describes a realm that is inclusive and in which there are places for all people. This dialogue arises at a time when Jesus was seeking reassure his followers, even in the face of pending disaster, that there always remains hope because of our belonging to God. He therefore invites his disciples to follow him, even through the destructiveness and emptiness of death. It is a surprising, and probably baffling, statement, but it creates a vision of humanity as belonging to something bigger than its own imagining.

Belonging and inclusion are important human needs. Hence St Paul describes in his letter to the church in Galatia: in God's world there are no distinctions between races, or class, or gender – all are one. This was a fairly challenging statement to make in the ancient world, but it reinforced the view of belonging and inclusion that is to be found in Christ. So, I wish to add the idea of 'inclusion' to that of 'integrity'.

### **Incarnation**

So, what is the secret of life? A good question to ask on an occasion such as this. The Bible teaches that the nature of God is love, which is what the reading from the First Letter to the Corinthians is about. Another mystery is that when we experience love we also experience something of the nature of God that is within us.

God's presence among us is described through a theological word called 'incarnation' or 'being in the flesh'. Jesus is described as God incarnate in humanity, but it doesn't stop there. God is also present in the flesh through his people. We are therefore also God's presence in the world today and that presence is to be discovered through love.

So, St John taught that 'God is love and those who live in love live in God and God lives in them'. Likewise, Jesus taught his disciples to love God and each other, which can be understood through what we call the Golden Rule: 'do to others as you would have them do to you'. A way into understanding the secret of life is therefore through healthy, loving, Godly relationships, which is part of 'incarnation'.

### **The Process of Transformation**

Life is therefore a process that needs to be experienced if we are to learn its mysteries. Although we may not know the ultimate destination of this process, we nevertheless are given glimpses of it through the story of the people of God, and in the person of Jesus – who was a human being like us, yet one who was also full of God's Spirit of love – God incarnate.

Integrity, inclusiveness and incarnation - our attitudes about life prepare us for death. After all, most of us tend to live our lives as we intend to go on. Moreover, the spiritual journey touches every aspect of life. It is not only concerned with having a set of beliefs and religious practices, but it is more importantly about willingly participating in the process of life-long transformation; which changes us spiritually, physically, mentally and emotionally.

The death and resurrection of Jesus became a sign of the resolution of the great dilemma of life that helps us to understand that death need not be feared. The hope for us is that resurrection comes to all that seek it on the one hand, but it is also about how we live our lives now on the other – integrity, inclusion and incarnation. We therefore remind ourselves of this journey of faith today as we farewell our friend Nicholas Shehadie.

+ Rest eternal grant to him; and may light perpetual shine upon him.