

**INTRODUCTION & WELCOME FOR THE FUNERAL OF ELSIE
LOUISA HUDSON**

13th October 1915 – 6th March 2020

HITHER GREEN CREMATORIUM, 24th March, 2020, 3.15pm

A very warm welcome to you, as we meet today to honour and celebrate the very long and full life of your dear Mother, Elsie Louisa Hudson, giving thanks for her warm, loving and caring nature, and her many special qualities and gifts. She was a very dear soul, and it has been a great honour and privilege to get to know her as her parish priest over these last fourteen and a half years. She was indeed an inspiration to all who were fortunate enough to know her well, as a loving Wife, Mother, Grandmother, Great Grandmother, Daughter, Sister, Aunt, and Friend to so many in our church family at St Andrew's, Mottingham, and in our local communities.

We meet in very difficult and challenging circumstances in the midst of the current Coronavirus epidemic, and it is sad that, after Elsie's community-oriented life of service, that we join together, just the four of us, for this very special service of farewell, thanksgiving, commendation and committal for your dear Mother. Nonetheless, we may be greatly assured of the prayers and support of family and friends, of all those who are not able to be with us today, and also you may wish to consider the possibility of honouring your Mother's memory more publicly in a special Memorial Service, when this current crisis has passed and social distancing becomes a strange, dystopian memory.

In our service today, we are united not only in honouring all that Elsie means to us, but also in joyous celebration of the deep and abiding Christian faith that meant so much to her, and was indeed a source of great comfort and strength to her, through all the joys and travails that life brings. She was, in every sense, a true Christian soul, and for this we give great thanks to God, honouring the tremendous example she gave of faith, hope humble and devoted service and love (or charity), the three great Christian virtues.

Given the abiding and profound nature of Elsie's faith commitment, we join today in commending her soul to God in confident expectation of the

joy, peace and blessing that await her in our Lord's heavenly mansions, after the trials and tribulations of recent years, in which Diane has supported her so unstintingly. We pray that she may enjoy the great blessing of eternal life won for us through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, and that, in accord with Jesus's high priestly prayer, she may now be one with God, just as the Father and Son are One (John 17:11).

Naturally, we meet also today to express our sadness and grief at Elsie's passing in the way that is right for each of us, and as we do this, please be assured of the prayers and deep sympathy of myself and all in our church family, along with that of family, friends and neighbours. We also hold in our hearts and minds the comforting thoughts that Elsie is now free from the pain and restrictions of great age, and that she is reunited with her beloved George and the many loved ones and friends who have crossed the threshold into heavenly existence before her. As we do this, we take comfort also in the bright Spring sunlight of this day, a light that is indeed so fitting as we celebrate the life of a radiant soul such as that of Elsie. This light stands in striking counterpoint and contrast to the darkness of these times, and reminds us of the spiritual inspiration that comes from a faithful life well lived: a life that was and is truly a wonderful example to us all.

So, as we unite for all of these purposes, we begin this very special service by joining together in prayer.

EULOGY

Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" begins with the unforgettable words "If music be the food of love, play on!" So says the lovelorn Duke Orsino, musing on his love for the beautiful Countess Olivia, and feeding his romantic passion with tuneful melodies. In a rather different sense, these words could readily be applied to Elsie, given her loving and caring nature, and the fact that music, especially choral music, was so dear to her (soul food, if you will), and was such a joyful part of the Christian worship and praise she was committed to.

For many years Elsie sang in the choir of St Catherine's, Rotherhithe, and she was also a keen singer at the Church of the Good Shepherd in

Lee, as well as an enthusiastic member of the Eltham Choral Society, which rehearsed at the Methodist Church in Westmount Road, and of course the St Andrew's choir and, in more recent years, the Ecumenical Choir formed by Beverley Howard. Elsie had a sweet and melodious voice, and throughout her life she made very good use of it in faithful Christian worship and in her commitment to community choirs.

For Elsie, as for so many, choral music was a wonderful expression of faith, and she rejoiced in the memory of choral concerts and services, not least a visit by Eltham Choral Society to sing with fellow choristers in Stavanger, in Southern Norway, and the early post-War period, to uplift the spirits of Norwegian brothers and sisters as they struggled to re-build their shattered and impoverished nation. Elsie recalled that although the Norwegians had nothing at that time, their welcome and hospitality were incredibly warm and generous. She also recalled, with less fondness, the fierce surge and swell stirring the North Sea on the crossing from England to Bergen, with inevitable bouts of sea sickness, and with one unfortunate chorister losing a set of false teeth over the side of the ship! This may be humorous in retrospect, but it was no doubt deeply embarrassing at the time!

In their happy married life together, Elsie and George offered a wonderful example as Christian parents and grandparents, and for them both regular worship and Christian fellowship formed a firm bedrock for shared family life. A selfless focus on putting the needs of others first came naturally to Elsie, so that leisure pursuits revolved around service to others. After a busy working life running the family business (a hardware shop and grocer's), in retirement Elsie and George spent six weeks each Summer helping out with special holidays for those with disabilities at Westcliff-on-Sea, pushing wheelchairs and ensuring that the disabled holiday-makers could make the most of their precious holiday by the sea. Elsie also knitted countless woollen squares to help make blankets for children in a Romanian orphanage, which were greatly valued. She was likewise tireless in her support of Christian Aid Week over many, many years, the administration of which takes far longer than the designated week itself!

In Mottingham, Christian Aid week is an ecumenical initiative co-ordinated under the auspices of Churches Together in Mottingham, and

Elsie, and of course Diane, have always been keen ecumenists, focussing on all that unites rather than separates Christian believers. This ecumenical focus ensures that Christian faith can be shared and rejoiced in more widely in the community, rather than be upheld in an exclusive way within the bounds of denominational worship. Elsie was a great exponent of this generous inclusivity and hospitality, which was beautifully expressed in the annual party of thanks to all those involved in Christian Aid collecting, held at Elsie and Diane's house for many years, and always a warm and convivial occasion marked by a lavish spread and 'doggy bags' a-plenty!

Generosity and warmth were indeed hallmarks of Elsie's God-given nature, and I was first privileged, in my second month at St Andrew's, to experience this, when Sarah and I were invited along with family, friends and the church community, to Elsie's 90th Birthday Party, a joyous celebration held in the St Andrew's Church Hall, and the first special party that Sarah and I were invited to share in as newcomers to the church and to Mottingham. This occasion is very special in my memory, not only for the momentous nature of the occasion, but also for the very warm welcome that made us feel that we were already part of the church community we had so recently joined.

Elsie participated fully in the life of this church community, supporting all the Eucharistic services on Sundays and mid-week, Festivals, seasonal services for Christmas, Lent and Easter, the occasional offices, and of course, Evensong, of which Elsie and Diane were tireless supporters. This service was very dear to Elsie, and to a band of committed worshippers, who valued the riches of the Anglican tradition, and naturally knew all of the choral settings and responses by heart.

There is so much to honour, give thanks for and to celebrate in this service today – much more than can be expressed in these few brief words. We each of us have our own special memories of Elsie's loving, caring, determined, and stoical nature, and through all that life brings, the great example of her Christian faithfulness, humility and, of course, the good cheer that came so naturally to her. Her emphasis was always upon counting her blessings, and humbly accepting all that life brings, being mindful of God's love, rather than focussing on negative thoughts. In all of these qualities, she was a beacon of light for us all, and we join

now in giving great thanks for her loving and faithful life so well lived, as we join together in commending her and one another to God's mercy, protection and eternal care, as we join together now in prayer.

Revd Ian Welch