

A MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN THE  
KEGWORTH AIR ACCIDENT ON 8 JANUARY 1989.

BELFAST CATHEDRAL : 21 FEBRUARY 1989 AT 3 p.m.

SERMON OF THE MOST REVEREND DR R.H.A. EAMES, ARCHBISHOP OF ARMAGH  
AND PRIMATE OF ALL IRELAND.

N.B. STRICT EMBARGO : 21 FEBRUARY 1989 AT 3 p.m.

Psalm 23, v.4.

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of  
death, I will fear no evil : for thou art with me,  
thy rod and thy staff comfort me."

For a few weeks before and after Christmas community shock and grief  
took on a new dimension in these islands. ~~For most people~~ In  
Northern Ireland Clapham ~~Disaster~~ and Lockerbie became household names.  
Pictures and reports in the media brought the horror of those dis-  
asters into our homes. We were aghast and 'we wept with those who  
wept'.

Yet, by and large, the tragedy of Clapham and even more the sheer  
magnitude of Lockerbie had a degree of objectivity for most of us  
in this Province. We were shocked and saddened but those disasters  
had occurred at a distance - we were identified with them through  
the common call of humanity, but there was an inevitable lack of  
close community identity so far as most people here were concerned.

On the evening of Sunday the eighth of January all this was to  
change.

Something which has become an integral part of life in Northern  
Ireland, the air link between London and Belfast, suddenly became  
the focal point, first of disbelief and then of immense sorrow and  
distress. Flight BD92 had ended near the beautiful village of  
Kegworth - and the lives of so many families in this community and  
in England were changed. Through the long hours of that night and  
the following day anxiety and anguish spread from the lounge at  
Aldergrove to so many homes.

The entire community of Northern Ireland was plunged into a degree  
of shared sorrow which, within the all too common picture of sudden  
death with which we live here, was somehow unique.



We are a small community and the events of that winter evening at Kegworth were to emphasise this yet again. Quite apart from the families most directly affected by the tragedy there was hardly a home in Northern Ireland which did not know something about at least one of those who were passengers on Flight BD92. Class and creed became of no significance in those days. There were bonds of common love and concern which surfaced from deep in the human spirit.

In this solemn service we have come together to remember before Almighty God those who lost their lives and those who mourn. In words and music we have remembered them. Today there are thoughts which do 'lie too deep for tears'. Today there are thoughts of a very personal nature for those who have come with the memory of a loved-one heavy on their hearts which they alone can fully feel. We remember those who are still in hospital, both here and in England and among them the pilot, Captain Hunt. In this Christian moment of remembrance may all those who bring sorrow with them find strength and comfort...

It is a moment of sad reflection for the days and weeks have passed. For some the details of that January night have become blurred - such is the nature of human experience. For others, the details, the emotions and the ache will never be forgotten. A voice, an expression, or the touch of a hand passed away at Kegworth. A visit to London to shop, to visit relatives and friends, to conduct business or to take a holiday brought people to Flight BD92. They boarded the flight at Heathrow from so many backgrounds and for so many reasons. A short time later they became united in the common bond of suffering - and a whole community was united in sorrow.

Human tragedy always brings with it a strange kaleidoscope of emotion and human endeavour. People react spontaneously, but others turn duty into an errand of loving mercy. Kegworth was no exception.

The speed and professionalism of the emergency services saved so many lives. From the fire-service, ambulance crews and police to the doctors and nurses : from surgeons and physicians to the voluntary services at the hospitals in Derby, Nottingham and Leicester : from chaplains, social workers and auxiliary staff to the RAC and AA patrols on the M1 : from the airport staff at East Midlands to their colleagues at Aldergrove : from relatives who reached out to each other and drew deep on human and spiritual resources they did not realise they possessed, to members of the general public who simply showed they cared - this was a time when out of tragedy came dignity, love and compassion.



So many were caught up in those events that it is invidious to emphasise some at the possible omission of others. But I feel I will be forgiven if I refer in particular to the staff of British Midland. I have heard constant and genuine gratitude expressed from so many lips to the staff of the airline. From the Chairman to the youngest stewardess their reaction and their humanity went far beyond the call of duty. So many have cause to be thankful to them.

In modern life air travel has changed the whole tapestry of life. We have become blasé about the miracle of modern jet travel. We become irritated when we are a few minutes late. Suddenly a normal flight is in trouble and we are compelled to stop and think. The responsibility we place on others and the expertise upon which we depend must never be taken lightly. It is at times like this that we are made aware of the awesome responsibility of those who provide public transportation, of those who for a few hours hold so many human lives in their hands. No effort is too costly and no trouble too great to ensure the maximum safety for all who travel by air.

"... though I walk through the valley of the shadow ...  
thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff comfort me."

The twenty-third psalm has a personal yet universal ring to it. For the Christian committed to the Faith as for the person who finds perhaps only an infrequent moment to dwell on the things of God its words have such a familiar sound to them. Through those words all the human condition is related to the strength and comfort of God. Joy and sorrow, strength of resolve and human frailty and finally eternal reassurance - all are captured by this ancient writer. But the underlying tone is one of complete and everlasting assurance. Through all the events of life, through all the experiences of the world, through all those happenings we cannot understand let alone accept, there is the certainty of the presence of a caring and a loving God.

From the beginning of time mankind has asked the same questions. At times of tragedy, just as in those transitory but so real chapters of personal life, man has asked "Why?". Why should it happen? How can it be allowed to happen? When human frustration has reached its ultimate climax in the unanswered question man so often turns that frustration in disbelief and even anger on God. How could a God of love allow it to happen?

How simple life would be if we could provide easy even bland answers to those questions which haunt us. But there are no easy answers.

The Christian answer is one which must appear strange to many. The Christian faith is simply that God is where we might least expect to find Him : He is in the disaster, in the tragedy, in the suffering and in the bereavement. From the birth of Christ



to His Resurrection at Easter, from the stable at Bethlehem to the appearances on the road to Emmaus, the message is the same. The loving and caring God to whom we turn in this service is not somehow outside it all, indifferent or untouched. He is in it with us.

When mankind cries out in pain he cries to one who knows pain. The suffering of Christ gives us this essential identity and closeness. It is in this strange fellowship of suffering that we find God and come to find His comfort.

There was a moment at Calvary on that first Good Friday when a question was asked which has been repeated ever since from countless lips : "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?". The scene at the Cross was to become a reflection of so much that is our experience of life since. Yet if the suffering of that Cross had something to say to mankind in his frustration and bewilderment then it was not a portrayal of defeat or weakness. It was an assurance that even in what we cannot understand God through Christ shares totally in that moment of suffering. That was the same thought captured centuries earlier by the Psalmist - even in the shadow the rod and the staff were there. There is simplicity yet profound strength in the claim of Christianity which transcends all denominational interpretation - there is nothing in life or in death which can separate us from the love and strength of God.

We saw that love in the gentle hands which reached out at Kegworth. We saw that love in the care of the theatres and hospital wards at Derby, Nottingham, Leicester and later here at home. We saw that love in the dignity of so many who lost a loved one on and since Sunday 8 January. The suffering Christ was there at Kegworth.

*Pause :*

She had experienced it all. The disbelief, the shock and the long waiting for news. Then it came and what she had feared most became a reality. As she walked slowly out into the cold morning air outside the hospital the words of her companions must have seemed very empty. But her own deepest thoughts found expression in simple down-to-earth words which said it all :

"I don't understand why or how it happened - but I feel already a strength I didn't know I had."

Into God's hands of love, into those everlasting arms, we commend all who died, those who mourn and those who continue to suffer.

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May those who seek that comfort and strength find it today.  
May the love and compassion of this whole community strengthen  
them. May the presence of Christ go with ~~them~~, now and always.

You.

*in yr. going out & coming in*

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of  
death, I will fear no evil" : for there, even there -  
"thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff comfort me."

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