

Tribute to Peter Everington by son, John Everington

It's a true joy to give thanks for Dad's life this morning in the company of so many family members and friends, both joining us here in person in our home church of 36 years or among the great cloud of witnesses watching around the world.

Dad's funeral falls at the start of the celebration period of Eid Al-Adha, when Muslims commemorate the willingness of the prophet Ibrahim (who Christians and Jews know as Abraham) to sacrifice his son Isaac, and the blessings that accrued to him from God as a result, with a ram being sacrificed in Isaac's place. A very special thank you to those who are foregoing the early celebrations to be here in person this morning.

Just to be clear, my father would be rightly horrified to be put on the same pedestal as Abraham, no matter the depth of his faithfulness. On a more personal level, I am very thankful that the Almighty didn't ask dad (as far as I'm aware anyway) to bind up his only son and sacrifice him as a burnt offering.

As with Abraham, Dad was given many precious gifts. Having joyfully surrendered his life to God's service, he sacrificed those gifts back to the service of the Lord's creation, within Initiatives of Change, St Dunstan's, and his everyday encounters (of which there very many) with those he met here in West London and around the world, for a good 70 years.

And beyond his formidable qualities of wisdom, faithfulness, grace, and perseverance, God in turn gave him an overflowing, irrepressible and divinely inspired joy. To paraphrase one of the songs from the MRA musical the Crowning Experience, the world walked into his heart, and he returned the favour, walking into the hearts of so many during his remarkable life.

He was blessed with a wonderful Scottish wife, with whom (after having learnt some valuable early lessons about differing driving styles) he formed a formidable partnership for over 50 years. He was a deeply loving father to me, and that love extended to Deborah and his dear granddaughter Sophie.

Never a musician, dad took great joy in music, whether it was blasting out a bagpipes CD as an accompaniment to my mother's birthday breakfasts, marking the start of the Christmas season with Carols from Kings College Cambridge (accompanied by the first slice of mum's Christmas cake), or finding solace and inspiration in great choral works, such as Mendelssohn's Elijah, Bach's Mass in B Minor, or Elgar's The Dream of Gerontius, which we'll hear a section of when we recess.

He loved poetry, reading, reciting and writing; James Elroy Flecker's The Golden Journey to Samarkand, was a particular favourite, with 'Away, for we are ready to a man! Our camels sniff the evening and are glad' often recited at the beginning of a long journey. Albert and the Lion by Stanley Holloway could be recited from memory. His own creations included loving verse from his time in Sudan, thank you messages in limerick form, and a poetic guide to the pronunciation of a former churchwarden's surname.

And of course there was sport; rowing, rugby, and above all cricket. Never a materialistic man, his membership of the Marylebone Cricket Club was extremely dear to him, so we felt it was only fitting that his membership tie should adorn his coffin. As with life, how you played the game was all important, with Stuart Broad's refusal to walk in the first Ashes test of 2013 prompting a disapproving letter to the English cricket captain.

Speaking of walking, the sight of the tall, slightly stooped English gentleman striding the Acton pavements has been a defining feature of the area since the late 1980s. Wherever life and his walks

took him, he would take great joy in talking with those he would meet along the way; neighbours, politicians, gardeners, academics, station masters, children of all ages, and everyone in between.

While Acton was home for the longest period of his life, in many ways his soul found its greatest rest in the Middle East and in his beloved Sudan and South Sudan; the majlises, gardens, and souqs (where he delighted in sampling the local dates). On a personal note, it was a wonderful joy to travel with him to Sudan in 2017 for the launch of his memoir by the Dal Cultural Forum in Khartoum, and to walk with him by the side of the White Nile.

He delivered his speech at the book launch in Arabic, and his love of the language endured until the end, nearly 70 years after he made his life changing decision to change his studies to Arabic at Cambridge. Every morning along with his time of quiet, he would read his New Daylight bible readings and reflections, and then cross referencing the reading in Arabic, using the Bible I brought him back from Damascus, following my year abroad 25 years ago.

My Arabic is pretty rusty these days, but let me conclude these remarks about a remarkable man of God and a beloved father with two sentences from the Islamic and Christian traditions, from which, I hope and believe, Muslims and Christians alike can find inspiration and comfort.

Inna lilahi wa ilayhi rajiun - Truly we belong to God, and to Him we shall return

And from the parable of the talents in the Gospel according to Matthew:

Hassanan fa'alta ayaha alabdu asalihi wa alaminu.... Well done good and faithful servant

Allah ma'ak ya baba - Goodbye Dad