**HOMILY – written and delivered by The Rev John Deane**

9 January 2019

St James’ Church, King St. Sydney

*The souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and no torment will ever touch them. In the eyes of the foolish they seemed to have died, and their departure was thought to be a disaster, and their going from us to be their destruction: but they are at peace.*

Three eulogies and a homily – I guess it sounds almost like some sort of religious film title. Indeed, a fitting memorial for one who was a relative, pastor, mentor and friend to many of us, who are here today.

Bishop Ken Mason was without doubt an extremely colourful, larger than life figure, with a zest for living (particularly when a party was involved) and a sense of humour and wit which is well remembered. Ken was a welcome guest and the loud deep laugh, which could reverberate around a room, was a hallmark of his sense of fun, and the enjoyment of simply being with people.

Yet for those of us who spent any time with Ken, it was always clear that these traits were grounded in a deep faith and were ever sustained by a wholehearted trust in God and belief in God’s promises:

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills: from whence cometh my help. My help cometh even from the Lord: who hath made heaven and earth. He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: and he that keepeth thee will not sleep.*

Throughout Bp Ken’s long and diverse ministry this sense of God’s care and providence was a constant. And a corresponding commitment to worship and prayer were an integral part of Ken’s life. Therefore, as we share our stories and celebrate his long life amongst us today, let us also use it as an opportunity to reflect on the nature and example of his response to what he and others clearly recognised as God’s calling.

Faith for Ken was not passive, and was certainly not limited to the cerebral. It required both an openness to God’s call and practical expression. It had to be incarnational by being lived out in the world and evangelical in seeking to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and bring the good news to where it was needed the most.

Since Ken’s death and in preparation for this homily I have had the opportunity to reflect a little on my own experience of his life and ministry. His gifts of witness, of bringing light and hope, were many but I would draw attention today to four in particular - friendship, invitation, hospitality, and inclusivity.

They are related, yet different, and I would suggest that they are at the heart of what it means to be called by God and to be engaged in God’s mission.

The large and diverse group of people drawn from various parts of the church and beyond attests to Ken’s enormous capacity to generate and maintain relationships. The range and diversity has never ceased to surprise me. Only recently did the daughter of a retired bishop in one of the most remote parts of Myanmar ask me how he was and recalled a kindness which he had done for her father many years before.

At the personal level friendship was always based on respect, and in one’s interactions with Ken, generosity and common sense were regularly to be encountered. Ken’s own perception of the acceptance and graciousness of God, which guided his own living, is well captured in the second reading from Paul’s letter to the Romans:

*What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him give us everything else?*

A generous and compassionate God was and is at the heart of the gospel and of our witness as followers of Jesus to the world. That does not mean that there is no challenge or even rebuke to be entered into, but any such actions are founded in love and not anger.

Yet in Ken’s ministry, relationships were not limited to the personal level but extended to groups within and outside the church and even to churches beyond our shores. At this level Ken was able to build a sense of partnering and partnership which was trailblazing in both its method and outcome.

In this respect I can speak from personal knowledge of his contribution to the Anglican Board of Mission and the deep regard in which he was and is still held by many of ABM’s partner churches. Both the current and former Archbishops of the Anglican Province of Hong Kong, in learning of Ken’s death, have noted the importance of Ken’s involvement and friendship for the creation of the province itself.

But friendship for Ken was not something that just happened. His interest in people often seemed unbounded. He liked meeting and engaging with new people. He possessed a great memory for names and the details of when he had met you, which was usually affirming, particularly to the stranger or the shy. He made time for you by seeking you out. A missional methodology with biblical precedent, which never seems to fail.

And once you had been invited, there was always an abundant hospitality. Extending to those around him that sense of being known and of being welcome, the sense that a place was already prepared for you. There was an unconditionality about relating to Ken and a sense that the ground was always safe. This type of hospitality leads to connection and bonding. It is the true glue of community and a foretaste of the promise of God’s kingdom:

*Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.*

And finally there was Ken’s gift of being able to gather you up and include you – not solely within the circle of his friends but more importantly within the community of faith. Ken’s ministry was imbued with a strong sense of the inclusive nature of God. Ken perceived almost instinctively that the Holy Spirit worked both within and outside the church, ever calling the Church to follow in the footsteps of the risen Lord.

In these times when the church within our society struggles with relevancy, Ken’s example of being able to reach out to the margins and find common ground should continue to challenge each and every one of us.

While none of us can claim perfection, some of us are graced with a life worthy of recognition on account of it being lived faithfully.

This homily began with the famous quote from the *Book of Wisdom* about God’s eternal faithfulness towards the righteous. In *Revelation* the reward of the faithful and the peace which they attain is developed further:

*They are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.*

This is the promise of God and the hope of all who follow in the footsteps of Jesus. It was Ken’s hope and we now entrust him to God’s merciful care.

And for those of us who remain and mourn, let us give thanks to God for the many ways our own lives and faith have been shaped and blessed by Ken’s presence and witness amongst us.