

Marcus Gilman RIP

Friday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

We are met today to give thanks to God for the life of Marcus Gilman, to comfort one another in our grief and to commiserate with those whose loss is most keenly felt: Lisa and Molly; Percy and Teresa together with their families.

Marcus grew up in these parts and loved the countryside. Oundle School introduced him to the benefits of philanthropy and he worked hard for Oundle Mencap. After University in Newcastle – that city has now recovered! – he spent 12 years in London successfully running a recruitment business. He returned to Rutland to get closer to the countryside and there met Lisa. The meeting was set up by a friend for him to meet a “saddo librarian”. How wrong could that description be! Marriage was soon a reality. They ‘wanted to get on with it’, in Lisa’s words. Marcus became a doting father and yet maintained huge numbers of friendships as we have heard. He soon became one of the pillars of this village and it was during a clear-up of this church that we first met. It was an encounter which promised so much – it fizzed with potential - but that was only six months ago. So my knowledge of him was slight, unlike those who have already spoken. However, I want to return to what Nick referred to as “the big rocks’ – those serious subjects in life which Marcus was eager to discuss in the company of a glass or two of wine, no doubt. There are three which I would like to share with you. They are not medical but theological: the purpose of life; Free will and the Universal God.

This untimely death makes us question all sort of issues and one is **the purpose of life**. As we have heard, Marcus lived life to the full. It made him so attractive. In 42 years he has accomplished much and that perhaps is the way we should judge his life, any life. As the poem read by Eddie Dove explains, it is not the *length* of life which matters but its *quality*. Think if you will of the great names in history. Mozart died at 35 under mysterious circumstances; Wilfred Owen was shot, aged 25; Eva Hesse died aged 34 of a brain tumour and Jesus Christ was crucified aged 33. It’s what we can give that counts; not what we can take. Human kind has a winging de-fault position, complaining at the slightest problem. But we have life as a gift and are bidden to live it abundantly. Marcus did.

The world we inhabit is not perfect; we have to make the most of what we have and Marcus has given so much to this community and to individuals within it. He has made it a better place, worth getting out of bed for, and for that we must be grateful. Life has been given to us to enjoy yes, but also to improve.

Secondly, **Free Will** comes as part of that gift of life. We can do what we like, within very wide limits. Had our lives been programmed – if we were not allowed to do wrong - then there would be no opportunity to do right either, or to love or to pour our lives into some great work of our own choosing. For Marcus, his choices were outstanding from a very young age: the way he dealt with people; it enriched their lives. He was a giver, not a taker. One of the greatest Christian philosophers, St Augustine, led a dissolute life as a young university lecturer until he *thought* his way into Christianity. Some of us change direction through the head, others by the heart or a combination of the two but we have that freedom which colours each of us and brings variety to our communities.

Thirdly, Christians believe in a **universal God** with authority in life and beyond death. Imagine a line of dominoes, all standing upright representing our lives. They stand still until some force outside the

line sets them off and then they tumble together. Such an illustration is used as a philosophical picture for the very existence of God but I use it to show that God stands within time as we know it but also outside time. Marcus had given up on religion but God hasn't given up on Marcus. Like the potter working away at his wheel, some of the clay falls off and is scooped up by the potter in order to re-work it into some other purpose.

How then can God bring some good out of this terrible tragedy? I do not know but faith encourages us to leave the question open. Oscar Wilde, that unlikely disciple of faith wrote from Reading Gaol; *'Where there is sorrow there is holy ground'*. Sorrow moves us out of our comfort zone to search for more secure support elsewhere. It is in these 'thin' moments, when the curtain between us and God is threadbare that God reaches out to us. Keats calls it *"the vale of soul-making"*.

We have all come here today chastened. This vibrant life, for which we give thanks, just highlights the tragedy which brought that life to an end. If it is not to be totally wasted then we too must shoulder some responsibility for a better future together. Marcus has brought us to the threshold of a new day and please God, a different way of treating one another. In a few more hours, another critical new day will begin in America as Donald Trump enters the White House. The world holds its breath. Today, the angels hold their breath, awaiting our resolve in the face of this tragedy.

Suicides among the farming fraternity are said to be three times higher than the average [Farmers' Weekly 2012] so in this rural community we need to be more vigilant on behalf of those who provide us with life's essentials. Villages have a greater advantage here. The communities are more intimate; their networks more defined; mutual support more direct. We cannot all commute to the town. Villages too need their places to meet – the shop, the church, the pub, the crèche – to break that sense of isolation which so many experience and not just farmers. As Anna has hinted already, we need to be less lukewarm in our relationships.

Marcus was not lukewarm. We owe it to him - to Lisa and Molly, Percy and Teresa - to make our response robust. Amen.