

## **Sermon preached for Marcus Pook's funeral. January 10th 2011**

I'm sure that uppermost in the turmoil of emotions that you bring to St Chad's today will be great sadness at the tragedy of the death of a man just short of his 52nd birthday. Someone many of you grew up with; a man so engaged with life. And in this place today we are all confronted with the knowledge of our own mortality. "In the midst of life we are in death" as the prayer book puts it so beautifully. We all know that we are going to die, but most of us don't know when – Marcus did, and that in itself is a cause of thanksgiving today.

He was a very open and honest man, and the diagnosis of his prostate cancer and the knowledge he probably had less than two years to live gave him time to prepare. Of course he wanted to get better, but he was always ready to talk openly about the fact that he might not. Those months gave him time to say the things we all need to say in the time before we die:

Please forgive me; I forgive you; thank you; I love you.

As someone so fully engaged with and enjoying this life, Marcus hadn't perhaps given much attention to the next, until the diagnosis. He had rejected the specific certainties of his childhood faith, but had not fully put in its place the faith of an adult – which is something we are all challenged to do.

On September 29th last year I was walking home from the town centre. I passed 15 Belmont, Marcus's home and suddenly knew I had to call. Emma, whom I hardly knew, answered the door and introduced me to Lee, her fiancé. Thus began an extraordinary journey which had God at its heart. I celebrated their rearranged marriage at St Alkmund's in December; Marcus with great bravery was able to walk Emma up the aisle and give her away. A few weeks later Marcus asked to see me. With his parents, daughter and sister around his bed, I asked if I could pray with him, to which he readily agreed. I commended him and those he loved to God and he then spontaneously asked God to forgive him for the past and placed himself in God's hands – "I believe, help my unbelief" he prayed. They were the words of an honest man and moments that none of us will ever forget.

When I saw him again a few days later not long before his death, he seemed much more at peace. We talked easily and naturally about Tanners and Majestic, about his early career, about his funeral.

Like Marcus, each of us is on a journey towards God's vision of what we might become. His love is like a magnet drawing us towards that goal. Marcus has travelled far along that road in the last 18 months. And for him that journey towards God will continue beyond the grave. As we give thanks for his life and commend him to God today, may his life and death encourage each one of us here at the beginning of this new year, not to neglect matters of life and death, time and eternity, man and God. This church and the Christian faith it witnesses to stand here to encourage all of us to make that journey and to engage with those ultimate questions with others, without fear, with faith, hope and confidence because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ.

**Mark Thomas**