

**FUNERAL SERVICE**  
**OF**  
**RUTH BEASLEY-MURRAY**

**3 June 1922 - 1 December 2020**



*Tuesday 15 December 2020, 12 noon*

*led by Paul Beasley-Murray*

*North Chapel, Woodvale Crematorium,  
Lewes Road, Brighton BN2 3QB*



## **A life remembered**

Ruth was born on 3 June 1922 to John and Daisy Weston, who ‘planted’ what became a vibrant Brethren assembly in Catford, South London. At the age of eighteen Ruth met her future husband George Beasley-Murray, then a Spurgeon’s College student leading a Christian Endeavour holiday in Ilfracombe, North Devon. Before the two-week holiday was over George told Ruth that she would become his wife! On 4 April 1942 George and Ruth were married at Ashurst Drive Baptist Church, Ilford, and for over fifty-one years shared a happy married life together. Ruth lived up to the Hebrew meaning of her name: she was a true ‘companion’.

Ruth was typical of many ministers’ wives of her generation. First and foremost a ‘home-maker’, she saw her role as supporting her husband in ministry – not least by ensuring that the children never interfered with George’s studies! Once married she never sought paid employment, but was happily involved in the life of George’s two churches (Ashurst Drive, Ilford, and Zion, Cambridge). She enjoyed cooking – and enjoyed even more welcoming guests into her home. When George became Principal of Spurgeon’s College, Ruth started regular meetings in her home for students’ wives and fiancées – ‘soirées’ as they were known – where the ‘talk’ was always followed by coffee and refreshments.

At that stage Ruth began to take on leadership roles in wider denominational life. A long-standing member of the national committee of the Baptist Ministers and Missionaries Fellowship, she became its President. In 1972 she was elected National President of the Baptist Women’s League and travelled up and down the country addressing groups of women. Ruth was also very involved in a ‘moral welfare’ project based at Vernon Baptist Church, King’s Cross; and an International Club attached to Bloomsbury Baptist Church. All this was in addition to bringing up her four children: Paul, Elizabeth, Stephen (now Grace), and Andrew.

Wherever George's work as a New Testament scholar and teacher took him, Ruth always was an active church member – first at Holmesdale Road Baptist Church, South Norwood in South London; then in the Seminary Church at Rüslikon and *Salemskapelle*, the main Baptist church in Zurich; and finally at St Matthew's Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky. In George's retirement she continued to be involved in local church life – at Elm Road Baptist Church, Beckenham; Holland Road Baptist Church, Hove; and St Peter's, Blatchington. In her final years she was a member of South Street Baptist Church, Portslade.

George died on 23 February 2000. Life as a widow became increasingly tough for her – how she missed George! Her last years were spent in care and were made difficult by physical pain as well as the loss of her sight. Yet despite all her later limitations she always 'counted her blessings' and remained cheerful to the end. She passed into her Saviour's presence on 1 December 2020.

## CONFRONTING DEATH; CELEBRATING RESURRECTION

Prelude: *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* and the *Italian Concerto in F Major, Andante*, by Johann Sebastian Bach  
played by Leon Fleischer and Fazil Say

Welcome

Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live" (John 11.25).

HYMN: Praise My Soul the King of Heaven  
sung by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge,  
conducted by Stephen Cleobury.

Praise, my soul, the King of heaven,  
To his feet thy tribute bring;  
Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,  
Who like me his praise should sing?  
Praise him, praise him,  
Praise him, praise him,  
Praise the everlasting King.

Praise him for his grace and favour  
To our fathers in distress;  
Praise him still the same for ever,  
Slow to chide and swift to bless:  
Praise him, praise him,  
Praise him, praise him,  
Glorious in his faithfulness.

Father-like he tends and spares us;  
Well our feeble frame he knows;  
In his hands he gently bears us,  
Rescues us from all our foes;  
Praise him, praise him,  
Praise him, praise him,  
Widely as his mercy flows.

Angels, help us to adore him,  
Ye behold him face to face,  
Sun and moon bow down before him,  
Dwellers all in time and space;  
Praise him, praise him,  
Praise him, praise him,  
Praise with us the God of grace.

Prayer: O Lord our God, how we thank you for the great hymns of the church and for the truths which they contain. We thank you for the hymn we have just heard, and for its reminder that you are the God of grace, whose love never changes; the faithful God who is always there for us. Today we come to you, very conscious of our frailty and needing strength for today, and hope for tomorrow. Come to us in our distress and reassure us of your loving presence. Help us as we hear the promises contained in your Word; help us to believe them, and in believing receive the comfort they offer.

## Scriptures:

Psalm 23: David reminds us that God cares for us:

“The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need. He lets me rest in fields of green grass and leads me to quiet pools of fresh water. He gives me new strength. He guides me in the right paths, as he has promised. Even if I go through the deepest darkness, I will not be afraid, Lord, for you are with me. Your shepherd’s rod and staff protect me... I know that your goodness and love will be with me all my life; and your house will be my home as long as I live.”

John 14.1,2,6: Jesus calls us to place our hope in him:

“Do not be worried and upset. Believe in God and believe also in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house, and I am going to prepare a place for you. I am the way; I am the truth; I am the life; no one goes to the Father except by me.”

1 Cor 15.20, 42-43,54-57: Jesus alone can give us life:

“The truth is that Christ has been raised from death, as the guarantee that those who sleep in death will also be raised. This is how it will be when the dead are raised to life. When the body is buried it is mortal; when raised it will be immortal. When buried it is ugly and weak; when raised it will be beautiful and strong. When buried it is a physical body; when raised it will be a spiritual body. When what is mortal has been clothed with what is immortal, and when what will die has been clothed with what

cannot die, then the scripture will come true: 'Death is destroyed; victory is complete'. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your power to hurt? Death gets its power to hurt from sin, and sin gets its power from the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

## Memories of our mother

Paul: As a child, whenever I could not sleep at night, Mother would come into the bedroom I shared with Stephen (now Grace) and sing me to sleep. Although she was not normally 'touchy-feely', she would at the same time stroke little circles around my eyes. It was always the same hymn: 'Lead kindly Light' by Cardinal Newman.

*Lead kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom, lead  
Thou me on  
The night is dark, and I am far from home; lead  
Thou me on.  
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see  
distant scene; one step enough for me.*

*I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou shouldst  
lead me on;  
I loved to choose and see my path; but now lead  
Thou me on.  
I loved the garish day, and spite of fears,  
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.*



*So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it will lead me on  
O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrents, till the  
night is gone;  
And with the morn those angel faces smile  
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.*

The singing and the stroking were hypnotic, and by verse three I was normally fast asleep. On my last two visits to Mother in her closing days I sang the hymn to her, and trust that somehow deep down it brought her comfort and peace, as it had brought to me.

Elizabeth: I remember Mother saying how once when she was on the way to speak at a women's meeting she needed the journey time to brush up her talk. She saw a woman at the station and she sensed this woman was going to get in her carriage and talk and talk and waste valuable time. She tried to get in a carriage far away from the woman but all to no avail. She had to put her papers away and just sit and listen. The woman was in deep distress and really needed someone to be with her in it. Mother realised initially that this was more important than her talk and then she realised this was her talk. Mother was very intuitive and had this way of being in the right time at the right place.

One of the gifts Mother had was organising fabulous parties – in particular at Spurgeon's College at Christmas time when the students were away and we had the run of the college.

Mother had a great sense of humour and was an excellent cook – two things that oiled the party wheels.

And now? I would like to say that it was as if the more frail Mother got and the more poorly she was, the more my sense of love for her deepened. Her dying was a merciful release of course, but it has left me with a sense of peace

Grace: In one of the last conversations I had with Mother, she shared three concerns that troubled her:

1: Mother said her life had been a failure. She thought she had achieved nothing. I said, “For everything Father achieved, you were there in the background enabling him to do it. When Father was writing books, you paced him in the number pages he wrote in a night. You brought him tea and biscuits to keep him going.”

2: Perhaps, Mother said, if she had been born a generation later she could have achieved something in business. “Yes,” I said. “You would have become a Chief Executive Officer somewhere because you have incredible organising skills. Remember in the USA you would cook church banquets for a hundred people and do the maths to see if you could beat your previous goal of paying less than a dollar a head.”

3: Mother smiled. “Remember going to see the play ‘Dear Octopus’,” she reminisced. “I was the Octopus – probably I shouldn’t have organised everybody, but you know, that’s what a mother has to do.” I laughed with her but didn’t comment.

Mother had her flaws. She almost certainly could never have accepted me as Grace. However, when I reflect on the myriad memories I have of her from my childhood, one truth about her stands out. Mother loved me into existence: a loving kindness which words cannot begin to convey.

Andrew: There are some things I can't forget about Mother.

She was always there for me when I was ill. When I was unwell the teacher sent me home and Mother was there, frequently bringing Dr Casey with his nicotine stained fingers into the room.

I don't remember any bedtime stories: instead I remember her sitting on the bed making me recite my 2x table. I remember too the compensation of one penny a chapter while being bribed to read *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Hard Times*.

I remember those summer days when she would bring iced banana milk shakes out to the garden at Spurgeon's while I was training for the 80 yds dash in the summer sports day at school. She attended all those school functions. I remember her turning up for an open day at primary school: I nearly died when I saw her appear at the door of the classroom. She came to see me play rugby on Saturdays. When I was six, she dressed me up as Father Christmas wearing loads of bright red paper and had me drag across the school hall a sled, which we had brought back from Switzerland.

I will not forget how she held me in her arms in the swimming pool: I was in tears, thinking I was about to die, while she was finding it all very jolly.

I recall how as a young child I had to eat up everything on my plate. To compensate Mother always had toy soldiers for me to enjoy as I ate my boiled egg.

I don't recall many unhappy days. Only instances of frustration such as being in the car waiting for Mother, and then Father would stop the car after one minute to have a prayer at the top of the drive!

I remember how much Mother was loved so much by people in Louisville. In some ways I feel sorry that she ever came back to live in England.

As I recall, Mother was always planning to make things happen for other people and never talked about herself.

HYMN:           Some Day The Silver Cord will Break,  
                    sung by Harding University Choir

Some day the silver cord will break  
Some day the silver cord will break,  
And I no more as now shall sing;  
But, O the joy when I shall wake  
Within the presence of the King!

*And I shall see Him face to face,  
And tell the story, saved by grace:  
And I shall see Him face to face,  
And tell the story, saved by grace.*

Some day my earthly house will fall,  
I cannot tell how soon 'twill be,  
But this I know – my All in all  
Has now a place with Him for me.

Some day, till then I'll watch and wait,  
My lamp all trimmed and burning bright,  
That when my Saviour I will greet,  
My faith will then be changed to sight

## Address

Some seven years ago, when I was visiting Mother, we talked about the hymn she wanted to be sung at her funeral: ‘Some Day The Silver Cord Will Break’. It was written by Fanny Crosby (1820-1915), a blind American Methodist poet, who wrote hymns such as ‘Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine’ and ‘To God be the Glory, Great Things He Has Done’. However, most of her other hymns (she wrote a remarkable 8,000 or so in all) have been forgotten, including ‘Some Day The Silver Cord Will Break’.

As Mother began to sing the hymn, I was deeply moved and I understood why the hymn resonated so strongly with her. For although it was only around 2010 that my mother began to lose her sight, by 2013 seeing was becoming increasingly difficult for her. The hymn looks forward to the day when, in the words of the chorus, we “shall see Him face to face”. Or as the last two lines of the final verse declare, on that day “when my Saviour I will greet, my faith will then be changed to sight”. I am told that Fanny Crosby once said: “When I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Saviour.”

Every verse of the hymn is full of Biblical allusions. The very first line, “Some day the silver cord will break”, for instance, is a quotation from Ecclesiastes 12.16, where the Teacher declares: “Remember your creator in the days of your youth... before the silver chord is snapped” (NRSV). The opening verses of Ecclesiastes 12 are exceedingly gloomy. They are all about the sadness of old age and the inevitability of death. Let me read them to you in the Good News Bible version, which gives clear expression to the complex allegory of death which is present:

“Remember your Creator while you are still young, before those dismal days and years come when you will say ‘I don’t enjoy life’. .... Then your arms, that have protected you, will tremble, and your legs, now strong, will grow weak. Your teeth will be too few to chew your food, and your eyes too dim to see clearly. Your

ears will be deaf to the noise of the street... Your hair will turn white; you will hardly be able to drag yourself along, and all desire will have gone.”

Old age can be cruel! The Teacher concludes:

“The silver chain will snap, and the golden lamp will fall and break;  
the rope at the well will break, and the water jar be shattered”  
(Eccl 12.6).

The picture is of the beauty and fragility of the human frame. One day the chain or cord will snap and the rope will break – and that will be that. Here there is no hope of life beyond the grave. Death is the end. As the Lord said to Adam and Eve after the Fall, “You are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Gen 3.19; see Eccl 12.7). The theme is *memento mori* – remember that we will all die! The Teacher is not revelling in the thought of old age and death; rather he is encouraging his readers to make the most of life – *carpe diem* (‘seize the day’)!

Thank God that we who read these words today live on the other side of the resurrection of Jesus. The message to ‘remember that we will all die’ has been transformed for us into a new key: ‘remember that we will all live’! In the stirring words of the Apostle Paul, set to wonderful music by Handel in *The Messiah*: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible” (1 Cor 15.51,52).

It is precisely because there is hope, that with Fanny Crosby we can sing not just of the silver cord breaking, but of the waking within the presence of the King. Or in the words of the chorus: “And I shall see Him face to face, and tell the story, saved by grace”. It was in that hope that Mother lived – and it was in that hope she died.

## Prayers:

1. Father, we praise you for the comfort of the Gospel. For Jesus has broken the power of death – he has brought life and immortality to light. We thank you for all that you have done for us in him. We praise you for his Cross where our sins are forgiven; for his Resurrection, on which our hope of life is anchored. We bless you that through faith in him the sting of death has been drawn.
2. Father, we come too to thank you for the life of our loved one and friend, Ruth Beasley-Murray. We thank you for all the good and happy memories we have of her. We thank you for her love and care for so many of us here; for her gift of hospitality and her delight in entertaining; for her life as a minister's wife in Ilford and Cambridge, and then in South Norwood, Rüschlikon and Louisville; for her service to churches up and down the land when she was President of the Baptist Women's League; for her encouragement and care for ministers' wives and student wives; and for the way in which in retirement she continued to serve churches in Beckenham and Hove. Above all, we thank you for her love for Jesus, and for the way in which she sought to share Jesus with us and with others. How we thank you for her. Yes, for all that she was to us as a mother, grandmother, sister, aunt and friend, we thank you. For all that she represented to us of your love, we thank you.
3. We pray for ourselves and all those who mourn her going. Her sister, Meg. Her children and their partners: Elizabeth and Mike, Grace and Charlotte, Andrew and Mariko, Caroline and myself. Her grandchildren: Jonathan, Timothy, Susannah and Benjamin; Mark, Philip and Amanda. The wider family, many of whom are represented here. Father, comfort us all in our sorrow. May we know your love, feel your care. Give us all faith to look

beyond our present trouble to Jesus, the one who died and rose again and lives for ever more.

HYMN: Thine be the Glory, Risen Conquering Son,  
sung by the Choir of King's College, Cambridge  
conducted by Stephen Cleobury

Thine be the glory! Risen, conquering Son;  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.  
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,  
Kept the folded grave clothes, where thy body lay:

*Thine be the glory! Risen, conquering Son;  
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.*

Lo! Jesus meets us, risen from the tomb,  
Lovingly he greets us, scatters fear and gloom;  
Let the church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,  
For her Lord now liveth, death hath lost its sting:

No more we doubt thee, glorious Prince of Life:  
Life is naught without thee: aid us in our strife;  
Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless  
love,  
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above:

Act of committal:

Thankful for the life of Ruth Beasley-Murray and for every precious memory of her we now commit her body to be cremated, confident of the resurrection to eternal life through our Lord Jesus Christ.



Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, you comforted your disciples when you were going to die: now set our troubled hearts at rest and banish our fears. You are the only way to the Father: help us to follow you. You are the truth: help us to know you. You are the life: give us that life, to live with you now and forever.

Benediction: “May the peace of God, which is beyond our utmost understanding and of far more worth than human reasoning, keep guard over our hearts and thoughts, through Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Philippians 4.7)

Postlude: Widor’s Toccata, played by Stephen Cleobury

Donations in lieu of flowers may be sent to the Torch Trust, a Christian charity (No. 1095904) set up 'to enable people with sight loss to have fulfilling Christian lives'. On more than one occasion Ruth went on holiday at one of their centres. She also loved to listen to their 'talking books'. Their HQ is Torch House, Torch Way, Northampton Road, Market Harborough, Leics, LE16 9HL. Gifts may be 'gift-aided'. Please mention your gift is in memory of Ruth Beasley-Murray

