**Julian Harley Thomson**

**(The memories of his children David, Bec and Lou)**

First of all, thanks to all of you who have come from near and far today. It's quite overwhelming to see so many gathered here to pay your respects to our father and your, Julian. We have been so touched by the many messages and conversations about the way he profoundly touched so many lives.

Dad was the very essence of faith, duty, compassion, selflessness and humility, a friend of man and a true servant of God!

Learned, but not arrogant; pious but never self-righteous; above all approachable, sincere and kind, he used his life to guide, teach, comfort, and support the communities he served.

Dad was born in Stow Bardolph on the night of the Dambusters’ raid, with the sound of the Lancasters of 617 Squadron from RAF Scampton reverberating in the Norfolk skies.

In an early lucky escape, he was nearly named Maximillian, the choice of his father, thwarted at the last minute by his mother who registered him as Julian... We've never been able to imagine him as a Max!

He certainly inherited some of his mother's impish irreverence and sense of rebellion, often using his middle name Harley to confuse fellow clergy at Deanery days.

Educated in Downham until he was 8, Dad then followed his brother Keith to board at King's School Ely as a chorister, surrounded by the majesty and choral tradition of the Cathedral. It was to Ely he would return in his late 20's as Precentor and 50 years later he was full of pride to see his granddaughters, Edie and Clemmie following the tradition and thriving at King's Ely too!

As a teenager he attended King's School in Peterborough and it was in the city he met his childhood sweetheart Brenda, our mother. So started a partnership that was far more than a marriage and together they ultimately built a Ministry that was greater than the sum of their parts.

Although it might seem strange to those who knew dad as a Minister and Spiritual Leader, a career in the church was not preordained. After school there were jobs in the labs at British Sugar, in farming and assisting a rural veterinary practice, but the Church was calling, and while his parents were away on holiday, in agreement with Mum, he decided to 'sign up' - leading to an extraordinary family panic and a dash home from vacation to try to dissuade him! Fortunately that attempt was unsuccessful!

So Dad and Mum found themselves newly wed in London in the swinging 60's, Dad a student at King's College, mum working at a branch of Barclays Bank, a bedsit in Earls Court, meditation classes, and buzzing about in a Blue Mini called Lulu... not sure it was quite Dad's scene, but Mum loved it!

Here he met lifelong friend Tony Healey (Uncle Tony), a staunch Catholic, bon viveur and teller of tall tales. Tony was an enduring influence, the pair spending years in correspondence talking of saints, miracles and angels!

So began his dedicated service to the Church and the many communities he served: first Wellingborough as curate where lifelong friendships were forged, then a return to Ely and his beloved Fenland in 1974 as Precentor and Vicar at Stuntney.

Here he was surrounded once again by the tradition and ceremony of the Cathedral and of course with music. Music was at the very core of his being and a constant through his life: shared with so many of you here today: from the high choral traditions of cathedrals, to small local singing groups, and even daily ditties to inspire those he met.

By now the family unit was complete: a young ordained clergyman, full of energy and vigour, a busy young mother full of love and support, three young children, dog, cats and goldfish all rubbing along at no. 32, still the Precentor's House in Ely today. We all have vivid memories of the personalities, elderly Deans, Deacons, and Canons appearing sometimes scary, sometimes like kindly ghosts among the high arching columns of the cathedral: us children clinging to and hiding in Dad's billowing vestments.

Stuntney gave Dad his first real taste of life in a rural parish and the ministry there became something of a template for his next posting at Orwell, Wimpole, Arrington and what he then described as 'hilly' Croydon. Gone was the big, chilly old house on the High Street in Ely, the traditions and pomp of the Cathedral, replaced by a brand-new Rectory, smaller, more rural parishes, somewhere to be part of a different type of community, somewhere to make a difference!

Here Dad and Mum started to become a formidable team... involved in everything and with everyone! Our home was always full of people - a meeting place ... Prayer Groups, Confirmation Classes, Young Wives, printing the Parish Newsletter on the kitchen table, the smell of duplicator ink and the purple stains on the hands of everyone rostered to help! Teaching at the primary school, Harvest Suppers, Amateur Dramatics, judging at the village show or being the target for a well-aimed sponge at the village fete.

The energy continued at Linton, Bartlow, Shudy and Castle Camps: somehow they managed to be everywhere, involved with everything, all of the time! Part of the fabric of the village, approachable, dependable, there for the good things in the parishioners' lives, Christenings, Weddings, Easter and Christmas but equally for the hard times we all face, providing spiritual comfort and solace, helping to make sense of it all, a door always open... there when it really mattered!

At Orwell we became aware of Dad's love of sport, which featured heavily in our lives too. From watching Cambridge United in the Habbin Stand the Abbey Stadium to a fervent Peterborough United FA Cup match - I still remember the crush when POSH scored and Dad protected us all from the pressing crowd behind us with his strong arms. In later years he would follow the Canaries ups and downs, and continue his support for West Ham - inherited from his Father... sport was not tribal to Dad. It was about being embedded in the place you were.

But Cricket was his first love: playing in the garden at Downham facing the bowling of his older brother, Keith. Dad wasn't always a very good loser in his younger years, and tales of throwing the bat down in tears was part of his humility and humanity as well as the curse of being the youngest! His big sister, Val, would calm the situation, as she often did. For us too he took us to endless hockey, football and tennis matches, as he did as Poppa with the grandkids – attending Edie and Clemmie's dance performances and Joe and Seth's football matches. We never managed to get him to one of Hannah's Cheerleading competitions, but he was always our cheerleader and greatest support.

Dad was always proud of his connections with the sugar beet industry and his own father's role as an Engineer for British Sugar. I have a very distinct memory of him picking up a sugar beet on our way home to Ely one day (I must have been 5 or 6 at the time) and cooking the beet in the kitchen. The smell stays with me to this day!

He watched the seasons tum, relishing nature every day in a thousand small ways and shared the despair of the farming communities he supported, alongside celebrating Harvest Festivals in a way I have never experienced since : with produce and flowers spilling from every window of the church, and adorning the altar with not just bounteous good things, but also items to be donated to local families and those in need: the earliest Food Banks, which they both carried on supporting to the end.

Growing was a constant through his life: from 'goosegogs' in Orwell, to the rose garden in Linton (Pascali - a favorite of his mother Edna's), to the the allotment in Massingham and the garden at the Primary School here in Massingham, which became a rewarding passion in his last years. Nurturing plants or sharing produce was a constant thread throughout his life. And this extended to baking after Mum died: I know many here today, will have been asked to taste test a latest recipe, or simply handed cakes and biscuits: a tangible way of spreading love and goodness through the community.

Spreading love and spreading the word is another core theme that has come up in people's kind comments: At Orwell Dad encouraged and mentored a young parishioner, who at the tender age of 8, was already set on a life in the church. Sam became a server and a bell ringer, and is now The Right Reverend Sam Corley, Bishop of Stockport. When we contacted him to tell him Dad had died he wrote back immediately, saddened, supportive, grateful for the example set and relayed this simple, but telling, story that I hope he doesn't mind us repeating. 'It was remarkable' Sam said, 'when I phoned him in June 2021 to let him know about my current appointment. I was phoning out of the blue and said he may not remember me, but in an instant he assured me he remembered me and listed the names of every member of my family. It was a remarkable - though not unsurprising - insight into the depth of his care and his love for others that left me humbled and with a renewed sense of gratitude for his example.". I know others too joined the Church in different capacities on the back of his example, and encouragement, and continue to serve to this day.

And so to Massingham in 2001... Early retirement at the age of 58 gave him a chance to live the spiritual life he wanted, away from the set duties of the parishes. And so he was truly blessed to have over 20 years as part of the community here, both in the churches, the allotments, the School, and as chief Womble - tidying up verges and pathways on his daily walks.

The bible text Jeremiah 6 v16 led them to Great Massingham "Thus says the Lord: Stand at the crossroads

and look, and ask for the ancient paths, where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls".

We have barely touched the surface of all that made up Dad - but we wanted today to share the man we knew. We hope the Thanksgiving Service provides a chance for all of us to reflect on our memories, share our own stories and celebrate the diverse and rich life of Dad, Poppa, Julian, Father Julian. But today we mourn and remember the life of a remarkable man who touched the lives of so many! A man of faith, duty, compassion, selflessness and humility!

There is no way of capturing the faith he lived on a daily, hourly, constant basis: with prayer and worship, the guidance and guardianship of angels (have you found out the name of yours yet, he would ask regularly). On that, perhaps it's only fitting to let him have the final words, taken from one of his many notebooks, which we hope would be his words to us all:

"Be always ready to help others. Let the way you live follow the Jesus way. We are daughters and sons of the King. We are all members of God's heavenly family and the Earth's family.

LET BE! LET GO! LET GOD!"