

Homily at the Requiem Mass for Fran Lambert

given by the Very Rev'd Roger Bush, Dean of Truro

25th September 2017

Isaac Newton may have been one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, but he wasn't a very nice human being; the distance between the scientific genius and the man behind the mathematical mask was pretty huge. He may have ended up as Master of the Royal Mint, a man of enormous prestige and wealth, but he got there at enormous cost to others, for it mattered not to him who got in his way on his path to posterity.

One of his experiments, famously, centred on observing how sunlight split into the colours of the rainbow after passing through a prism. Nothing unique there – it had been observed countless times, but what Newton did was to pass the rainbow back through a second prism, re-combining the colours of the spectrum into the white light that generated the rainbow in the first place, and proving to him that light is made up of tiny particles. When a fellow scientist, Robert Hooke, proffered a different solution, Newton turned on him with devastating ferocity, did the seventeenth century equivalent of sending the boys round, and ensured that Hooke's reputation would be forever trashed. And it worked. A scientist of equal rank to Newton, who remembers Hooke today?

Not, then, a pleasant man. He could understand the rainbow, why it was the way it was, and reduce it to physical properties and equations. But he could never *be* the rainbow. There is a crucial difference, and that difference is revealed in the rainbow life of the woman whose life we are celebrating here, our beloved Fran. You see, it is one thing to observe and rationalise a wonder of nature; it is quite another thing to *be* that wonder. I don't think Fran ever contributed much to our understanding of quantum mechanics – there is not, to my knowledge, a Fran Bosun lurking in the world of the very small – but I know, as we all do, that this woman irradiated the world with her rainbow qualities as few people have done.

And if the source of the rainbow is the light splitting into its constituent colours, then the source of Fran's life was her Lord, whose light radiated from her in a constant stream of self-offering. But that's not strictly accurate. What Fran did was to not only receive the light of Christ, and bathe in its resplendence, but she also refracted that light, splitting it up into the glorious colours of the rainbow, a rainbow of Christian expression and living that blessed so many people in its glow. In effect Fran, the loving Fran, the faithful Fran was a human prism, displaying the rainbow colours of Christ to all who knew her.

A key, pivotal moment in her walk with Jesus came in 1983, when she was 29, already a wife and mother, with a career in nursing already developing, and a vibrant faith fashioning her personality. It was then that she took the vows of the Third Order of St Francis, something which guided her vocation as a Christian thereafter until the day she died. But this wasn't some Brother Sun and Sister Moon adoption of a post-hippy spiritual fad. This was real; she read the Rule of the Third Order daily, not as a manual, a list of dos and don'ts to keep your religious nose clean, but as a way into the deeper reality of God. She promised to conform her life to the life of Jesus as a *lived* experience, not as a trumpeting of dogmatic certainties, or a retreat into a confessional piety, but as a whole and humble offering of her very self. And this had a remarkable effect on not only her, but also those around her, for it was this that generated the rainbow Fran.

So, what were the colours that she displayed?

From the broader wavelength of the spectrum, there was the red of the warmth and love she refracted freely to her beloved Phil, and their children and grandchildren. This was the love that was the still centre of her world, around which revolved everything else. This was the love that gave her identity and depth, a vision of the divine love that holds us all in God's palm, and this was the love that spilled out spontaneously to all who came within her orbit. Then there was the orange of Fran and Phil's legendary hospitality, which was nothing more or less than the extending of that love to others, friend and stranger alike; she loved spending time with people, enjoying their company, exploring their loves and losses with genuine interest and concern. And between friend and stranger she never discriminated, fun and companionship dancing around her, like butterflies fluttering around the buddleia.

Then there was the yellow of her wonderful skills as a breast cancer nurse, which was for her much more than an exercise in health care, but a vocation in which she developed with her patients a breadth and depth of care and compassion that was a priestly ministry in its own right, and in so doing she flooded the darkness of those in her care with the light of her compassion. Her green light was her service to the many church communities she served with indefatigable energy, of her faith in action, which is, of course, how it should be – not for her the inward-looking, self-obsessed attitudes that can easily beset many church communities. Whose scones should take pride of place at the parish cream tea was frankly not something that Fran cared too much about – but orienting the church towards causes that matter, the environment (she loved nature and was unrelenting in her commitment to raise awareness about how our short-term actions did lasting damage to the planet), fair trade and issues of justice, now that was a different matter. *This* is how the Gospel should be preached, and she was *this* Gospel's leading advocate.

Which takes us to the fastest wavelengths of all, the blue, the indigo and the violet, where all these strands were driven by her ferocious levels of energy, ensuring that we wouldn't fail to notice the bigger things we ought to be aware of; you couldn't hide behind a pillar and expect Fran not to find you!

The glorious colours of Fran's rainbow found a summation in a particular ministry she exercised here, in this cathedral church. She loved being a cathedral guide – again that opportunity to meet people – and serving in the sanctuary, but everything came together in her ministry as a communion assistant, where anyone and everyone could come to the altar rail to meet their Lord in the sacrament, and there was Fran, offering the cup of salvation to them. For her, this was the prism in reverse, the colours of her life coming together to form a single beam of light, pointing those whom she held in her heart back to Jesus. Which is what Rule of the Third Order asked of her: “We remember that we follow the Son of Man, who came eating and drinking, who loved the birds and the flowers, who blessed little children, who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners, and who sat at the tables of both rich and poor. We delight in fun and laughter, rejoicing in God's world. We mix freely with people, ready to bind up the broken-hearted and to bring joy into the lives of others. We carry within us an inner peace and happiness.” Sound like anyone you know? This Jesus, the Jesus of love and compassion, the Jesus of righteous anger, the Jesus of peace and reconciliation, this Jesus she could not fail to refract, and who burned even more brightly in those last few weeks of her life.

For this was no raging against the dying of the light. As her life was ebbing away the last thing the light was doing in Fran was dying, but rather becoming more luminescent, more radiant. Of course, there were times of difficulty, of a sense of God's absence, but this only had the effect of intensifying the giftedness she had received and displayed throughout her previous 63 years: the partying went into overdrive, the laughter more spontaneous, the care for others, ensuring Philip did get that Mars bar, more determined. She wasn't preparing for death; she was getting ready for heaven, which is, after all, how she lived her life, how she refracted the light of Christ to the world and the people around her, revealing kingdom values in all their colour. Now she was, in a sense, de-fracting that light, becoming a double prism, returning her colours to the source of all light, God himself.

But we, we have to cope, in the aftermath of her tragically early death, with a different kind of refraction. For what is re-fraction if not a re-breaking? We *are* conscious of Fran's rainbow, but it is vying with our own sense of brokenness as we survey the distorted image of our loss. For Philip and those closest to her this is particularly acute, and you, dear friend, are in our thoughts, prayers and hearts at this acutely difficult time, but none of us here is unaffected by her death, by our

own sense of loss. This is the flip side of love, of course, the agony that shadows the ecstasy.

But we will survive. We will share stories of her, we will laugh, we will cry, we will support each other, we will be there for each other. And ultimately, because our faith will kick in and make it so, we will not be as downcast as we perhaps are now. We will lift up our eyes to the hills, and rising above them will be the colours of the rainbow, Fran's rainbow, absorbing our sorrows, and guiding us to the fulfilment of our hopes.

For that ultimately is what a rainbow is. Newton achieved greatness by reducing the rainbow to a physical law, the beauty becoming nothing more than a set of equations. But we can't live with equations; the beauty bursts through the graph paper, and more than the beauty, because the rainbow is the sign of the promise of the glory of God, so that, as the flood of our grief begins to abate, there will be a new life, a new possibility, a new hope which will be as real for us, as it was for Noah and his family as his ark came to rest.

And it is a promise made real in the life of Frances Lambert, née Wicks, our loving, caring, committed, funny, faithful, beautiful, radiant daughter, wife, mother, grandmother, friend and colleague, who could do nothing but show, in her life and through her life, the colour of light.



Truro Cathedral