



For this holiday weekend with its fair share of barbeques and social gatherings amongst family and friends, the centerpiece of television or other forms of digital screens may still play a rather prominent role, perhaps as an actual focus viewing the first weekend of college football or U.S. Open Tennis or a NASCAR race; or, for some, it will be a needed distraction to get away from certain family and friends you may not be overly enthused conversing with too much. Now, for some of us, we may turn to it a bit too much in our day-to-day life, but in its relatively short history, the

square screen has provided us ways to nearly having a front row seat to world-shaping events that we may not have otherwise: the first moon landing, the Live Aid Concert in 1985 with the biggest musical performers responding to the famine at that time, and yes, a fair share of notable sporting events over the years as well.

However, even for us Americans, there's still this worldwide affinity for a certain family in England: a family who is far from perfect, even if they pride themselves in all the proper etiquette on camera and photographs taken, and a history with numerous generations, who have been far from perfect as well. Nevertheless, whether it's an abdication from a throne or the most over-the-top weddings you can ever imagine or a certain son deciding to move over to our side of the Atlantic pond to live with his American actress spouse and then back to the UK within the last couple of weeks; through it all, the world keeps on tuning into them through all the forms of media at our instantaneous disposal.

Except, oddly enough, today, is the anniversary of one of the more somber days for that royal family, and one of the most watched events in television history. It was on this day in 1997 that the funeral of Princess Diana was held at Westminster Abbey in London. It is believed that 2.5 billion people watched from all over the world, as she became a most captivating figure before she died far, far too young at 36 years of age. Now, for those who still remember from nearly 30 years ago, most can recall Elton John's rendition of "Candle in the Wind" or the choirs or the royal procession line into the chapel. But, until recently, I had not heard or read the eulogy spoken by Princess Diana's brother, Earl Spencer.

Now, just to let you know, there is this on-going debate amongst some clergy about eulogies, or sharing of memories, during funerals and memorial services. After all, there's a bit of risk taken when you allow people the stage, in a sense, to share basically whatever they want about the one they lost. Some of those sharings can go on for quite a while: a long quite a while. Not to mention, some of the content and language may not always be the most appropriate for the religious settings, but it's a risk we often believe is worth taking; because in those accounts often arise a proclamation of the Gospel we just heard, that "when two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

At one point in Earl Spencer's eulogy, he said this:

The last time I saw Diana was on July the first, her birthday, in London, when, typically, she was not taking time to celebrate her special day with friends, but was guest of honor at a fundraising charity evening. She sparkled, of course, but I would rather cherish the days I spent with her in March, when she came to visit me and my children in our home in South Africa...

These were the days I will always treasure. It was as if we had been transported back to our childhood, when we spent such an enormous amount of time together: the two youngest in the family.

Fundamentally, she hadn't changed at all from the big sister who mothered me as a baby, fought with me at school, and endured those long train journeys between our parents' homes with me at weekends. It is a tribute to her level-headedness and strength that despite the most bizarre life imaginable after her childhood, she remained intact, true to herself.

Above all, we give thanks for the life of a woman I'm so proud to be able to call my sister: the unique, the complex, the extraordinary and irreplaceable Diana, whose beauty, both internal and external, will never be extinguished from our minds.

A humble but most beautiful reminder that, sometimes in the gatherings of two or three, are indeed where Christ is present just as much as a packed cathedral. In the gathering of two youngest siblings, is when a brother is re-assured that he is truly loved, a tangible display of the unconditional love of God. Sometimes, in the gathering of two or three, one can one feel further welcomed to be unique and complex, and not experience judgment or feelings of guilt or shame. In the gathering of two or three, are moments that can be just as life-shaping and deeply memorable as the times when in front of a crowd; moments when you might just feel a holy level of God's intimate connection to the authentic child of God you, the title that supersedes any other that this world can give. In the gathering of two or three, forgiveness in its actual hope-filled beautiful form of restoration and new life can be wonderfully given as described in Matthew. In the gathering of two or three, can the church still be at its Gospel best. In the gathering of two or three, even if Jesus' name doesn't manage to slip into the honest and heart-wrenching conversations, the Lord adores far too much to not still beautifully rise in the midst of the heart-to-heart human-connecting. In the gathering of two or three, might just be the times of our life we hope to never end: like a brother and sister who manage to be there for each other when their worlds were in absolute chaos around them.

Something else I didn't know was spoken at Princess Diana's funeral that has reeled me in ever since:

*Time is too slow for those who wait,
Too swift for those who fear,
Too long for those who grieve,
Too short for those who rejoice,
But for those who love, time is eternity.*

And, so may we as the church, even in the gatherings of two or three, remain dedicated to unleashing that eternal feeling of a love that withstood the time of earthly life and death, and managed to rise to bless us with everlasting life in Jesus Christ, our Lord. For that Greatest News still for us all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!

For the full text of Earl Spencer's eulogy, please visit:

<https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/9thearlspencerdianaeeulogy.htm>