

# MAUNDY

Leadership and identity
in life and death

ANDREW WATSON

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# A NOTE FROM BRF MINISTRIES

*Jules Morgan, acting CEO*

It is a privilege and a profound responsibility for BRF Ministries to introduce this final work by the Rt Revd Andrew Watson. We do so with gratitude, affection and a deep sense of honour because this is not simply a book we have chosen to publish, but one that Andrew himself asked us to bring into being in the closing weeks of his life.

When Richard Fisher, our CEO, wrote to Andrew in February 2026 to assure him of our prayers and support following the news of his illness, Andrew's reply was characteristically direct, hopeful and purposeful. Alongside his words came a manuscript – *Maundy: Leadership and identity in life and death*. In that message, Andrew spoke with clarity about the urgency of his situation and the significance of the material he was entrusting to us. There was no self-pity, only a quiet determination that these reflections (which have been shaped over years of ministry and sharpened in the light of his terminal diagnosis) might continue to serve the church. For all of us at BRF Ministries, there was never any doubt about our response. It was our great honour and delight to immediately say yes to Andrew, and to commit ourselves to sharing this work as widely as possible. That sense of privilege has only deepened in the months since his death.

My own connection with Andrew goes back many years, when he first welcomed our young family to St Stephen's Twickenham, where he was vicar at the time. We last saw Andrew in October 2025 for the 150th anniversary of that church, when past and present clergy and congregation members celebrated and reminisced together; it was a joyous time. Like so many others there, I experienced first-hand the warmth, attentiveness and spiritual depth that marked his ministry. Andrew had a remarkable ability to make time for people, to listen deeply and to connect the truths of the gospel with the realities of

everyday life. Whether in conversation, preaching or writing, he brought together theological clarity and pastoral sensitivity in a way that was compelling and life-giving.

This book bears all the hallmarks of that gift. At its heart is a collection of Maundy Thursday sermons preached over a turbulent and demanding decade in the life of the church. In them, Andrew returns repeatedly to the themes of leadership, humility, service and identity, grounded in the example of Christ. Yet these are not abstract reflections; they are rooted in the lived experience of ministry, in the complexities of leadership and, ultimately, in Andrew's own journey as he faced the end of his earthly life.

The final section, 'Four Last Songs', carries particular poignancy. Written in the shadow of his illness, these pieces offer a window into a faith that remained steadfast to the end. They are marked not by fear, but by trust and confidence in the enduring love of God. As Andrew writes: 'I don't fear the prospect of dying and find to my relief that my faith in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting has only grown stronger.' Those words resonate throughout this book.

Andrew expressed a hope that this might be the most widely read of his books, and that any royalties would support the life and ministry of Guildford Cathedral. We are honoured to play our part in fulfilling that hope, and we pray that this book will serve as a lasting resource for leaders, ministers and all who seek to follow Christ more faithfully – particularly in times of challenge and uncertainty.

In publishing this work, we are conscious that we are handling something deeply personal and profoundly significant. This is Andrew's final offering to the church – a distillation of years of reflection, experience and faith. It is a gift, given with generosity and courage, at a time when every moment mattered. We commend it to you with gratitude for Andrew's life and ministry, and with the prayer that, as you read, you may be encouraged, challenged and drawn more deeply into the servant-hearted leadership to which Christ calls us all.

# FOREWORD

*Stephen Cottrell, Archbishop of York*

On 26 February, and, as it turned out, just five days before he died, Andrew Watson wrote to me, with typical understated faithfulness, asking whether I might write a Foreword for this book of sermons he had put together in his last weeks.

'Stephen,' he wrote, 'I've not been entirely idle since receiving the diagnosis, though realistically I do seem to be getting a little weaker as the days go by. I've written a small book based around the ten sermons I've preached at Chrism Eucharists… I was just wondering whether there was any chance of a Foreword from you?'

I was incredibly moved to receive this request. Andrew and I were good colleagues, who loved and respected each other, though we were never close friends. Therefore, I was both honoured and slightly surprised to be asked. I think what may have prompted it is our shared belief in preaching. When, like so many of us, I received his letter on 19 February telling the diocese of his terminal diagnosis, I wrote to him and reminisced about a sermon I heard him preach at least 20 years ago. It was a beautiful and powerful sermon preached at the annual inauguration service for the College of Evangelists. The sermon drew on Greek mythology and the story of the sirens, whose intoxicating music lured hapless sailors to their destruction on the rocks, and how Orpheus was able to navigate a safe passage by playing a more beautiful song. In the sermon, Andrew spoke about the more beautiful music of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how it not only drowned out the siren voices of the world, but was something so beautiful that we were drawn to follow it instead, and that this music would sustain us, no matter what, even through death itself.

I wanted to remind him of this sermon. How it had spoken to my heart. And how I hoped it would help him to hear it again and that he would be sustained and led by the beautiful music of the gospel; and that he may know the presence of Christ, who is both the singer and the song.

I also confessed to having crafted my own version of his sermon in the intervening years. After all, there is nothing new under the sun, and those of us who are preachers are forever looking for ideas and stories to borrow.

So I happily agreed to write this Foreword and have been deeply moved to read these ten profound reflections on Christian ministry and learn more about what made Andrew's discipleship tick and the things he shared with the clergy he served. I was also encouraged to find that he, too, as well as borrowing material, reuses it, and there in the first sermon he ever preached as Bishop of Guildford was this arresting image from Greek mythology and Jason inviting Orpheus to take up his harp and sing a more beautiful song.

Each of these deeply reflective and carefully crafted sermons on the nature and purpose of Christian ministry and of the gospel we are called to share is deeply moving. They will serve as a great testimony to Andrew's ministry as a bishop in the church of God and of his love and service to the Diocese of Guildford. But for those of us who knew him and loved him and worked alongside him, I think it is his 'Four Last Songs' that end this book that are the most powerful: a wonderful confirmation sermon, the final one he preached; a reflection for Ash Wednesday; and then the two letters he wrote to Guildford diocese before he died.

In the confirmation sermon, he says this of his identity in Christ:

> That through Christ I have been adopted into the family of God; that through Christ, and despite all my flaws and failings, I've received the Holy Spirit and therefore know myself loved, called and blessed beyond measure.

This faithfulness and the words of Eugene Peterson that he borrowed, about 'cheerfully persisting in living in the hope that nothing separates us from Christ's love', shines through these final letters and have given me, and many, many others, an inspiring lesson in dying well.

The Church of England's Ordinal tells us that one of the main duties of a priest is to prepare the dying for their death. Having read these Four Last Songs and thought deeply about Andrew's testimony in his final days, I think, perhaps, I want to say it is the only task.

Our whole life is a journey home to the God who made us, who loves us and who, in Christ, has come to set us free from bondage to sin and death. His death on the cross is for the forgiveness of sins and is the gateway to eternal life, where Christ has gone before us to prepare a way and a place. By his resurrection, God shows us our future, and Andrew's simple testimony shows how we might cheerfully persist in our faith until the day when we are called to meet the Lord face to face.

With characteristic faithfulness, the fourth of Andrew's Four Last Songs ends with a quotation from scripture, the beautiful words at the end of Paul's first letter to the church in Thessalonica. Andrew always gives the last word to God.

It will be hard to read these last things without tears, and I certainly wept as I read again this last letter. So, forgive me, Andrew, for giving you the last word in this little Foreword to your lovely little book.

In your Chrism Eucharist sermon of 2017, you mused on all the different adjectives we use in the church to describe ourselves and sometimes define ourselves against one another. However, you remind us that whatever adjective we use, 'the noun is always Christian'.

So, go forth upon your journey good and faithful Christian soul. Thank you for helping us to know Christ. And thank you for helping us to approach death with faithfulness and put to our trust, like you, in him who 'loved us and gave himself up for us' (Ephesians 5:2).

# INTRODUCTION

Of all the many and varied preaching opportunities offered to bishops, perhaps the most cherished of them all is the chance to preach at the Chrism Eucharist on Maundy Thursday. Clergy and lay leaders from across the diocese gather around word and sacrament in the holiest season of the church's year; vows are renewed and oils are blessed. So it's hard to overstate the sense of privilege that I, for one, have felt on each such occasion, as I've mounted the steps of the mighty stone pulpit in Guildford Cathedral.

With great privilege, though, comes great responsibility. Stirring the hearts of a congregation of experienced and gifted preachers, who are often in active rather than reflective mode as they embark on the exhausting last lap of the Lenten marathon, is not without its challenges. But here's where the sermons at Chrism Eucharists are at least better-prepared than the average, with no easy access to the cut-and-paste function beloved of travelling preachers everywhere. Rallying the troops with stale bread has never been the best of strategies!

The Chrism Eucharist in 2025 was as special an occasion as any, and at that point I was feeling very well, with absolutely no sign of what was to come. I was assuming that I would continue as Bishop of Guildford (and Beverly as Vicar of Onslow Village) for another few years; and attending the 150th anniversary of the completion of St Stephen's East Twickenham a few months' later finally confirmed just where we would like to retire to, with so many friends remaining in that part of London from my happy years as vicar there from 1996 to 2008.

My good health was confirmed during a routine but thorough medical check-up in August 2025, and I certainly had no qualms about embarking on a busy autumn schedule, including an opportunity to speak to all the bishops in the Church of Nigeria, together with senior clergy

and lay people from each of their dioceses – a powerful time, though sometimes testing my diplomatic skills to their limit. And it wasn't until October that I started noticing a dull, gnawing pain in my stomach which gradually began to affect my appetite, my weight and my sleep.

A trip to our doctor led to a series of tests, each of which came back as reassuringly normal. I tried going gluten-free for a while, which again ruled out another potential cause of the problem. Increasing pain over Christmas led to a trip to accident and emergency, and a brand new series of tests. But as fireworks from Guildford and Woking and our neighbouring village of Jacobs Well heralded in the new year, we still felt positive about what lay ahead – our ruby wedding anniversary, our daughter Lydia's ordination, the birth of more grandchildren and plenty more beside – while also beginning to open up to our family and close friends about the cloud on the horizon and asking for their prayers.

And then came three great bombshells – or maybe 'thunder claps', to continue the cloud imagery – which crashed over us over the course of just a few weeks: first, that a large lump had been found growing on my pancreas with some suspicious shading on my liver; secondly, that both were cancerous and inoperable; and thirdly, that the type of pancreatic cancer with which I am contending is both rare and extremely malignant, so that I would immediately be transferred from hospital to hospice care, with a life expectancy of weeks not months.

My response to the bombshells is, I think, well-articulated in the two pastoral letters that I wrote to the diocese, which are published again towards the end of this book, and I don't plan to elaborate on that further. But as we have now entered the season of Lent, and as another Chrism Eucharist approaches (but one from which I will sadly be absent), I have been freshly drawn to the Jesus of Maundy Thursday, and especially to his great prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane: 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, yet not my will, but yours be done' (Luke 22:42).

So why this book? I have, of course, a huge bank of my sermons in my online library – several thousand of them in all. But given the scarcity of time, and the fact that only a small proportion of what I have written should be saved for posterity, the idea of putting together a decade's worth of Maundy Thursday sermons – with the added 'bonus' of the sermon I preached at my installation as Bishop of Guildford and an afterword consisting of what I have described as my 'Four Last Songs' – seems realistic and, I hope, edifying.

At the very least this little project has helped to focus my mind on some of the key attributes of what it means to be a Christian disciple and minister through testing times, as well as lessening my disappointment that the Chrism Eucharist of 2025 is destined to have been my last.



In Andrew Watson's final book before his death from pancreatic cancer, he presents a decade's worth of Chrism sermons at Guildford Cathedral – the Maundy Thursday sermons he gave as Bishop of Guildford. With characteristic humour and warmth, he reflects on these Lenten Bible passages, bringing gentle challenge and deep insight.

This book also contains Andrew's 'Four Last Songs', his final writings after receiving his terminal cancer diagnosis. This includes his two pastoral letters to his beloved diocese, a confirmation sermon on knowing who you are, and a Lenten reflection on wilderness.



**Andrew Watson** was Bishop of Guildford from 2014 until his death from pancreatic cancer in 2026. He was previously Bishop of Aston in Birmingham. He has also written *Confidence in the Living God* (BRF Ministries, 2016), *The Fourfold Leadership of Jesus* (BRF Ministries, 2008) and *The Way of the Desert* (BRF Ministries, new edition 2026).

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