

Sermon on Wednesday 26 September at St Mary's Hertingfordbury by Rev. Alan Stewart

Miss Dolly Parton

Yesterday, the world lost not only one of its best songwriters, businesswomen and philanthropists, but also one of the greatest examples of how to be a Christian... Miss Dolly Parton.



Everyone loved her; her candor, her humour (*'It costs a lot of money to look this cheap!'*), her grit, her grace; her deep faith that carried her throughout her life from dirt-poor beginnings in Tennessee to global mega-stardom.

She reminded us what wealth and influence can do in the hands of someone whose life is lived for others; someone who remembered what it is to have nothing, someone who values human beings over being a billionaire.

Instead, she spent her life giving her wealth away. Famously, her father couldn't read or write, so Dolly started the non-profit Dollywood Foundation to fight illiteracy. She created Dolly Parton's Imagination Library which has donated over 300 million books to children all over the world. She raised money for HIV charities when other Christians were calling the AIDS pandemic God's Judgement. She helped fund cancer centres and hospitals, and donated millions of dollars during Covid to develop vaccines. The list goes on.

Living in a country music world often populated by racism and homophobia, Dolly risked popularity and financial gain by advocating for Black Lives Matter and for the LGBTQ community.

'I think everybody should be allowed to be who they are and to love who they love,' she famously said in an interview. 'A good Christian should not judge. I mean, that's God's business, not yours. I believe we're all God's children and everybody has to deal with God in their own way. We're supposed to love one another.'

That love emanated from Dolly's words and actions.

For 80 years, she showed us that the measure of a life is in what we do with what we are given, how we treat people around us, and the person we are in both lack and abundance.

In his tribute this morning, the American pastor John Pavlovitz wrote: *'Her single greatest performance was as a human being, which makes her among the richest people who have ever graced this planet.'*

Today, we mourn the loss of a First Lady of Country, who touched and changed the lives of so many, especially those who have lived with poverty and discrimination. But we rejoice in the magnitude of the legacy of this humble diminutive woman.

We are all creating a legacy of some kind. What legacy will you, will I, leave? Will we, like Dolly, leave this world a better place than we found it?