



## **A Service of Commemoration and Thanksgiving for Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II**

Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> September 2022

readings: [Micah 6.6-8](#) and [John 13.1-15](#)

Today, as well as our emotions and responses to the death of Her Majesty, and all that we feel about the transition of monarchy in this time of such national and global turmoil, we will be carrying our own personal and community losses and grief – as King Charles and the members of the Royal family are carrying their own deep personal loss.

We hold them, and all those who mourn in our prayers. As our late Queen said, in her message of condolence to the American people after 9/11 'grief is the price you pay for love'. So – If I may, as I begin - if the events of these last days have brought difficult things to the surface for you, I hope you find someone to talk to. And if someone you know seems like they are struggling, have the courage to ask if they are OK, and if they'd like to talk.

One of the few times her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth overran her schedule, I believe, was on an occasion that she hosted Holocaust survivors at Buckingham Palace. Despite the pressures of her timetable and the (discrete) reminders of her entourage, the Queen gave her undivided attention to each survivor and listened until every story had been told. In that circumstance she knew that what was important was putting aside the panoply of state and offering loving service in a simple act of kindness.

Jesus said, we have just heard:

'You call me teacher and Lord – and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example.'

We gather to commemorate and give thanks for Life of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and her long reign of faithful service. As we have been reminded in the introduction to this service, 'We recall especially the unfailing way in which she carried out the promises she made from the earliest days of her reign, and, even in our sadness, we rejoice at the remembrance of her kindly humanity, her royal dignity, her gentle constancy, her loving leadership, and the enduring commitment she showed to her people'.

We gather, people of all faiths – or no faith, to honour our late Queen. That we do this with such respect and affection is testament not just to longevity, nor simply a demonstration of duty, but a recognition of example – a whole life offered in service.

Over the past 70 years we have seen the Queen choose to put duty and Christian service at the heart of monarchy. Her words, said on her 21st Birthday in 1947, were not the empty promises of an over enthusiastic young woman - they were a personal commitment kept through more than 7 decades:

'I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service.'

For our late Queen, that service to the people of the nations of the United Kingdom and her other Realms and the Commonwealth was rooted in and sustained by her longer and deeper service to Christ.

In the month prior to her coronation, the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, gave the Queen a short book of personal daily devotions, of Bible readings, prayers and reflections shaped around the different aspects of the Coronation Service to help her prepare. Her everyday life, every part of her life, was to become something we cannot imagine – but it was to be her life and she wanted it to be lived after the example of Jesus. Before her coronation, in an early radio broadcast, Queen Elizabeth asked the people of the Commonwealth to pray that she would faithfully serve God and them all the days of her life.

For the past 70 years Her Majesty has striven to live out those prayers. She has said, 'For me the life of Jesus Christ ... is an inspiration and anchor in my life. A role model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. His example has taught me'. And, more recently, she has reflected, 'Billions of people now follow Jesus' teaching and find in Him the guiding light for their lives. I am one of them because Christ's example helps me see the value of doing small things with great love.'

As I reflected when we gathered only a few months ago to celebrate the Platinum Jubilee, what we saw of the Queen's life may not seem to us 'small things' but in fact all our lives are made up of moments of small things: whether with Heads of State or a stranger on the street, with our families and households, with our friends and colleagues, with our neighbours, when we are at home, at work, at school, and at play. For our Queen, many of those 'small things' were visible to billions of people across the globe, observed and commented on endlessly. Some of our late Queen's life will have seemed distant and removed from our realities, some of it we will have disagreed with, but much of it many of us have admired and in it we may have recognised the delights and pains of our own lives.

It may have seemed that all she ever had to do was turn up to events in beautiful clothes and remember not to yawn or fidget if she was bored or weary. Even if that were the case, I would commend her for the amount of turning up she did, in so many places, for so many years, surrounded and scrutinised by so many people. Many of us here will hold personal memories of encounters with her.

But she didn't just turn up. She was widely read and well informed. She was prepared for and attentive to every meeting and event. She was profoundly aware of the unique contribution she needed to make to every engagement, and she was committed to continuing to learn that she might better encourage, advise, support and influence providing the security and stability that offered both continuity and the possibility of change for good.

Not that she got everything right, in public or in private, but, in the words of the prophet Micah, she strove to act justly, love kindly and walk humbly with God. As she said herself, 'I know how much I rely on my own faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning, I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God ... I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel'.

That Christian gospel teaches that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus God offers us salvation and hope: forgiveness of sin, recreation in the Spirit, fullness of life now and for eternity. Christians believe that Jesus reveals the Kingdom of God and invites us to share in work of that Kingdom.

Our late Queen understood that her Kingdoms were under the authority of that Kingdom. She took her faith seriously. It was not just her inheritance, it was for her a constant living reality. She read the scriptures and pondered them, and liked to discuss and consider them; she said her prayers, investing in her own relationship with God and praying for others; she went to church as a discipline to give structure and foundation to her own life, and as a witness to others. Increasingly she spoke publicly about her faith. First and last, she knew, a Christian is a follower of Jesus, a disciple – like an apprentice. Being a follower of Jesus is about what we do and how we do it, as well as what we think and why we think it. And it takes practice. Being a follower of Jesus is about every day, about every part of life: following the example of Jesus - our whole life offered in service. Our late Queen was a shining example of discipleship - offering her whole life, public and private, in service following the example of Jesus.

May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

In words spoken by the Queen, from the Coronation Service, let us pray:

Take, O Lord, and receive all my liberty,  
my memory, my understanding, and all my will,  
all I have and possess.

Thou hast given all this to me: to thee, O Lord, I restore it;  
all is thine, dispose of it entirely according to thy will.

Give me thy love and grace, for this is enough for me.

Amen.

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