



A Service of Reflection on the Eve of the Funeral of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

Sunday 18th September 2022

Reading: [1 Peter 1.3-9](#)

As someone said in the queue along by the Thames today. 'She has always been there for us'. That is why we are here!

What a suitably bold, confident foundation our Reading from 1 Peter gives us for our thoughts this evening:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! By his great mercy he has given us a new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.

True for our late Queen, and surely true for us. We do not grieve without hope – as she herself told the nation in April 2020 as the Coronavirus was spreading fast –

“We need Easter as much as ever. As dark as death can be - particularly for those suffering with grief - light and life are greater.”

What is revealed in the resurrection of Jesus is a glorious promise, 'Kept in heaven for you'. Hence joy, in the midst of the sadness. In the words of English Poet Alexander Pope, often quoted by those who had lived through the war 'Hope springs eternal in the human breast.'

And so along the banks of the Thames miles of mourners have waited and walked, hour after hour- wanting to be there at this time to honour our late Queen Elizabeth, many of them speaking of what a privilege it was simply to be there. Laughing, crying, sharing, recounting their personal memories.

What a privilege, in fact, to have been alive during her long reign!

But what a privilege also, if a sad one, to witness the solemnity and singularity of these days, this time of transition, when grief, gratitude, and hope, combine to awaken in us a desire – to live a life worth living, full of meaning and purpose from start to finish.

We have heard from another English Poet this evening – Simon Armitage, the Poet Laureate. Interviewed on the BBC this week he described the challenge of poetry. He said it was 'in a few small words, to describe a great idea'. You may agree with me his acrostic poem on the name 'Elizabeth' does that job wonderfully well.

But that is the challenge of words, sometimes they fail. They don't quite get it. How can a grand idea be best set forth?

For Her late Majesty the Queen, the greatest idea of all was set forth not in so many words, but in a real person - in Jesus Christ.

In 2016 she said, 'Billions of people now follow Christ's 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, whoever does them and whatever they themselves believe.'"

This evening our thoughts are rightly with those who mourn. The King, and all the royal family. How generous they have been in sharing themselves with the public at a time of deeply private, personal sorrow!

And yet in this time of mourning it is as if in public life the pause button has been pressed...

Here are just a few of the stories recalled these last ten days:

The small boy who received a personal letter from the Queen when she found his balloon whilst walking the corgis in Windsor Great Park.

Then Terry Waite –returning from four years being held hostage by terrorists in Lebanon, quietly invited by the Queen to stay in a cottages at Balmoral for as much time as he and the family needed....

And – irresistibly, that other story from Balmoral - our the Queen out walking up in the heather, accompanied by her security officer, Richard Griffin. Approached by a couple of American tourists in hiking gear they strike up a friendly conversation. Not recognising the Queen in her headscarf, the hikers asked – Do you live round here? – No, I live in the south of England, but I've been coming here for 80 years - I have a holiday home just over the hill, there. Obviously impressed they ask, 'you must have met the Queen? No – but Dick has, many times.' Passing his camera to the lady he asked, 'Would you take a photo?'

Many have said that through changing times our late Queen has been steadfast. The world has changed, in so many ways – for the better, for example from one of empire with all that was, good and bad, that went with that, to one of free and independent nations in partnership within a Commonwealth. In her time the Common Weal, the Common Good has been emerging as a priority, over and above self interest, or national interest. These are seismic changes. Hard lessons are still being learned. We have a long way to go.

Hard times come to us all – and our late Queen has been no exception. Love's costly path to forgiveness and reconciliation was one she knew, and commended to others: 2011: 'Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.'

It has seemed that as she grew older, she also grew bolder – both in her affirmation of faith in Christ, her example and her rock – and in her readiness to take on new, surprising things.

Surprising the world by taking to the film set to open the Olympics - 'Good evening Mr Bond'

And just months ago surprising everyone – including her own family, inviting Paddington to tea, confiding to her marmalade sandwich loving co-conspirator – 'so do I – I keep mine in here, for later.'

Speaking of later, what next? With all that we face in this age with war, climate change, economic crisis, poverty, hunger - whilst praying for our King, we pray also for all the world heads of state gathering for tomorrow's funeral. May all be inspired to follow our late Queen's example of integrity, love and service!

At this historic moment, may we all seek and seek until we find that most important thing of all, that pearl of great price, the loving wisdom of our God, without which we are nothing. As our late Queen said,

“Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves – from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person – neither a philosopher nor a general (important though they are) – but a Saviour, with the power to forgive.”

If you don't mind, let the last word go to that young bear, the fictional refugee picked up by the Brown family at Paddington Station, but also made welcome this year at the Queen's Jubilee tea table, despite his typically clumsy table manners.

A few words said it all.

'Happy Jubilee Ma'am,' he said.

'And thank youfor everything.'

May Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth rest in peace and rise in Glory.

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