

## Commemoration Service for the life of Queen Elizabeth II

Sunday 11th September 2022, Revelation 21:1-7 and Luke 15:1-10

“Neighbour” is a word that has been used a lot over the last few days, as people have shared their thoughts and reminiscences of Her Majesty the Queen. At Balmoral Castle on Royal Deeside in Aberdeenshire, the people spoke of her warmly in those terms. Balmoral is not in fact some windy castle miles into the wilderness of the Highlands; it sits just across the river from the busy Upper Deeside Road and is within easy distance of Ballater and Braemar. If you visit the shops there, they are full of photos of members of the Royal Family buying sausages: Local.

Likewise, in Windsor the same - the Chip Shop man opposite the Castle spoke of living next door. (though he didn't say whether the Queen used to pop in for a late night kebab) : Discretion.

But let us be honest: the Queen was not *quite* the girl next door. She was our Sovereign, under whom we have been blessed in this country to have been godly and quietly governed for 70 years. And now the old order passes, and we proclaim, not in fear or apprehension, but rejoicing, Long Live the King.

There is nothing to fear. We mourn, but we do not grieve. We give thanks, we reflect, and we move seamlessly with the times into a new chapter in the story of this Realm. That is how monarchy works: the Queen is dead, long live the King.

Our Gospel reading today is the familiar story of the Good Samaritan. It must be right up there in the top ten most memorable passages in the Bible. We can all nod our approval of the one person who did not pass by on the other side. We can see obvious parallels with the life of unstinting service and duty undertaken and fulfilled by our Servant Queen for all of her reign, just as she promised in those now strange sounding, clipped tones of the 1940s, so many generations and another country ago, when she, twenty-one years old, promised to serve all of her days, whether her life be short or long.

We know that long service - the public round, the millions of bouquets, the plaques unveiled by ribbons, and bottles against ships' hulls, and investitures, dinners, garden parties and polite enquiries and a hundred thousand, thousand handshakes. We know that all world leaders, from the most humble and grounded to the most puffed up, vain and grandiose, shared one thing: they were all desperate to meet the Queen. It is also a sort of truth, that one of the most popular dreams that people have, is of having tea with the Queen. She has counselled, advised and warned her Prime Ministers. She has spoken to and for us all at times of National peril, grief and celebration. She has even had tea with Paddington Bear.

She has been a constant. She has served. She has been our neighbour.

In our Gospel reading, the walk on part is taken by that good old fashioned baddy, The Lawyer. (Nobody loves a lawyer - until you need one, but that is a different story.) Growing up as a baby barrister you are taught a few things about what people like to call, "the art of cross-examination". Firstly, cross-examination is *not* examining crossly. Secondly, and very importantly, you are taught never to ask a question to which that you do not know the answer. Nice idea and it does not always work out, but there is sense in that, because if you are fishing or guessing, the answer can be potentially disastrous.

In our Gospel reading the lawyer makes that classic mistake. He asks a question to he does not know the answer. Who is my neighbour? He thinks it is a killer question of this upstart Jesus of Nazareth, but he does not know the answer. And so Jesus tells him the story of the Good Samaritan, and of course, when Jesus turns the question back on the lawyer, the lawyer has to concede that the good neighbour is not the Priest or the Levite, busy observing the Law, but the one - an undesirable alien - who served the man in mercy. He served.

But the Queen not only served, but exemplified a life of faith. That too, has been said often over the airwaves the last few days. As Christians it has always been rather wonderful that, when we as a Nation have been stuffed with food and drink on Christmas Day, lying about on sofas semi-comatose, and surrounded by wrapping paper and presents, the Queen - without fail - made her broadcast, and **always** referenced her faith to what she did. She did not shy away from the bad times; she rejoiced in the good. But what was singular about her message was that, cutting through the Christmas Pudding, she was talking about God. She talked about faith. She was, in a steady and dignified way, an unapologetic evangelist.

Yet, what do we mean when we talk about a life of faith? Good works, such as the Samaritan did, are not exclusive to Christianity. Christianity cannot claim any monopoly there. Nor can we in other areas where Christ's church is militant - active - here on earth, as the Book of Common Prayer has it. We are not exclusive in our concerns for social justice, the environment, peace between nations, and loving kindness between people.

But we **are** exclusive however in our trust in God. That is faith. That in the bad times, when relationships falter and become bitter, when we experience loss, when it is one thing after another, we must remember to trust in God and take, as the Queen once said, the long view.

And faith is about asking questions of God. We can ask for help. We can ask for healing and for peace for ourselves and for others. We can ask for and receive God's grace. We can receive in the unlikeliest of ways; what once was so wrong may turn out to be so right. We can find healing and peace.

We do that by asking the questions to which we do not know the answer. So yes, of course let us rejoice in the kindness and mercy of the Good Samaritan. But we can also thank the lawyer - if not pay his bill - because the story shows that when we

ask a question to which we do not know the answer, we open ourselves up to God's grace, God's healing and God's peace.

At the moment we may be feeling a little disconcerted. The Queen has reigned for so long, and so well; she has been part of our Christmas and our calendar year. Whatever else may have been going wrong in the Country, however much we may have felt dismayed or let down in other aspects of public life and Government for whatever reason, the Queen has been above it all, has been constant and true.

We are a great country. We are battered; we need a lick of paint; we have some real problems, acute problems, some of which are egregious to face and resolve; we cannot be complacent. We have some real injustices, and there is war in Europe. But through it all and despite it all we have Institutions that endure in the name of the Sovereign; we have an ethic of service that still cuts through the opportunists and the greedy; we still know decency, fairness, respect, integrity and safety. We are not a defeated or a morally bankrupt nation. We are not in the thrall of despotism or corruption. We go on in continuity. We are strong. We can be proud, for more is right than is wrong.

So this is not a time for despair. We mourn but not grieve. This is a time for reflection but thanksgiving; for mourning and togetherness. And it is Sunday. We are in Church. We come to give thanks for the life of Elizabeth our departed Queen, and we come to worship God.

On Friday evening our Sovereign King Charles III pledged, as his mother did all those years ago, to serve. He re-affirmed his commitment and his love; and he re-affirmed his faith. If we can give one thing of which her late Majesty would approve this special weekend, it is that we too re-affirm ourselves in service, love and faith.

And if we are unsure of ourselves and our immediate future, then all we have to do, is to ask of God the questions to which we do not know the answers - and keep an ear and an eye and hand out for the answer.

Reigns begin and end on earth, but the reign of the Prince of Peace endures for ever.

Long live the King.  
God save the King.

***Amen***

***Rev'd Andrew Hurst***

***Curate***

***St Mark's, Newnham***

***St Andrew and St Mary, Grantchester***