

14th Sunday after Trinity, Second Sunday after the Queen's passing  
Lamentations 3.22-26, 31-33; Psalm 121; 2 Cor. ; John 6.35-40

A week ago Thursday the Queen died at her summer Scottish retreat of Balmoral Castle. The tributes, messages, conversations, TV and radio programmes have been many. On BBC Radio 4 I appreciated **The Queen Remembered** hosted by James Naughtie and a number of the episodes from **Reflections on Majesty**, especially of Simon Heffer, Antonia Fraser and above the rest Michael Morpugo.

Beginning his reflection with the Queen's father, George VI, Morpugo said:

"There was once a good king much loved by his people, because he endured with them years of great danger. Under threat from mass bombings, of imminent invasion and almost certain defeat at the hands of a cruel and merciless tyrant. He decided his place was with his people. This good king was not born to be king. Not supposed to be king."

I begin with King George VI, the Queen's father, as people seek to explain aspects of the Queen's formation character and personality. The abdication of Edward VIII in 1936 and the accession of George VI to the throne has a biblical dimension to it. When we think of Samuel telling,

"Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these. <sup>11</sup> Are these all the sons you have?" "There's still the youngest one," Jesse answered. "He's tending the sheep."

Edward born to be king, the more charismatic of the two brothers, was to hand over to George VI. Was this within God's providence? King George VI is he of the stutter, sensitively brought to the screen in **The King's Speech** starring Colin Firth. His example and the love of and for her family (King, Queen Mary, Princess Margaret) were aspects that shaped the Queen. Another bedrock, as we know well at Christ Church was the Queen's faith. In **The Queen Remembered** her faith is identified as a bedrock. It will be her constant companion. The title of episode 6 of **The**

**Queen Remembered** reads, "The Private Monarch, The importance to the Queen of her country pursuits and of her abiding faith." Her Christian faith.

You have to tread carefully today when speaking about the Christian faith and of the Queen's faith in today's Britain. Of the 13-minute episode 3 minutes were given to the wider dimensions of her religious life and of these three minutes 90 seconds to her Christian faith. This silence is not surprising. You have to be a person of faith to know just how deeply faith permeates every aspect of a person's life. And today you must learn or relearn, against your better or more cautious instincts, to speak up and out. Today it can even be dangerous.

In episode 6 we first hear the Queen saying,

"It is rightly acknowledged that people of faith have no monopoly of virtue and that well-being and prosperity of the nation depend on the contribution of individuals and groups of all faiths and none."

She the Queen will have known this well that we have no monopoly on virtue. She was brought up with and nurtured in the 1662 BCP. There we pray, "Do not weigh our merits, but pardon our offences". We do so in the sure knowledge that all good things come from God and that we all dependent on God's grace.

It is left to a bishop, the former Bishop of London to spell it out that the Queen's faith was a Christian faith through and through. He says,

"I remember one Christmas broadcast in particular, where she used the phrase 'there are millions of people who look to Jesus Christ as their guide in life and I am one of them'". The bishop goes on to say, "Earlier in the reign her advisors tried to suggest to her that it (Britain/England) is now a multi-cultural country, you ought to be rather vaguer about that. But no she was utterly clear. I think that it is very difficult to be consistent, disciplined without some sense of responsibility to something beyond. ... There was an extraordinary consistency and integrity about it all and that

was because there was a sense of obligation beyond her interests or her mood.”

This “something beyond” of which Bishop Richard speaks is God, the living God, who spake by the prophets, who has made Himself known in Jesus Christ. It is this Jesus, Son of God, the Queen worshipped, witnessed to and was inspired by. Her Sunday attendance at Sandringham parish church with the family was always a news item over the Christmas period. The royal baptisms were always of public interest. Each pointing to the centrality of a faith professed, lived, practised and handed on.

For the Queen the most significant moment of her coronation was her being anointed, which takes us far back in time. We are reminded of the anointing of a king by Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet. This connection to people of faith in the past gives us a sense of our place before God in the history of the world. One outcome of this heightened awareness will be a seeking after and growing in humility, what our preacher last Sunday called becoming small, like God becoming small in Jesus Christ.

Immediately before the anointing a prayer was said. I will read a section of it.

Strengthen her, O Lord, with the Holy Ghost the Comforter;  
Confirm and stablish her with thy free and princely Spirit,  
the Spirit of wisdom and government,  
the Spirit of counsel and ghostly strength,  
the Spirit of knowledge and true godliness,  
and fill her, O Lord, with the Spirit of thy holy fear,  
now and for ever; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

The Archbishop, then Geoffrey Fisher, proceeded to anoint the Sovereign:

“Be thy Hands anointed with holy Oil.  
Be thy Breast anointed with holy Oil.  
Be thy Head anointed with holy Oil:  
as kings, priests, and prophets were anointed...”.

I am reminded of the wonderful image conjured up in Psalm 133.2: *It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments...*" This precious ointment is when sisters and brothers live in unity.

The readings appointed for today by the Church of England on this Second Sunday since the Queen's passing supersede those normally set. This is extraordinary. It is the first time that such a thing has happened during my ministry and indicates just how significant the Queen as a person, this particular person, was to the Church of England as Supreme Governor and the Nation and across the world. It is also a recognition that her passing would trigger an outpouring of grief, would be a reminder of our own mortality and would bring back the memories of loved ones who have preceded us. This is the case for many.

Concerning grief there are a few moments when there is a common grieving of a people, of a nation. It does happen like at the time of the sudden and tragic death of Princess Diana, but the dimensions of the Queen's passing are other and are monumental. At a time of upheaval (Umbrüche) and change marked by uncertainty her passing can be likened for many who only ever knew her as their monarch as to losing a good friend or a beloved family member. The Second Elizabethan Era has come to an end with her passing. An era, which to my mind, stretches back to Edward VIII's abdication and the accession of George VI to the throne, whose ministry, leading by example, is carried forward and deepened by Elizabeth, his Lilibeth. She lived a long life of devoted service. She had a deep sense of obligation and duty. She was disciplined. She was hard working. She knew how to have fun, people speak of her sense of humour, the twinkle in her eye and she had interests such as her horses and corgis. She was a faithful disciple: one who follows and one who learns. Above

all, her life, was rooted in her confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour embedded in the life of faith lived. During her long reign she would become the Church of England's greatest witness always willing to witness to the faith with her.

As close I want to direct our attention to words of St. Paul to the church in Corinth, which we already heard. "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." These words speak well of the faith that is ours and the hope that is in us. Thanks be to God. They are words that encourage us. Words that carry us forward (running the race that is set before us), that give us confidence to face the uncertainties of our age with God by our side - come what may. A faith we share with the Queen, our sister in the faith with the household of God. When Paul speaks of the earthly tent he is speaking of our bodies which as we know are not made for eternity, as he says elsewhere, "the perishable must put on the imperishable".

May the Queen rest in peace and be raised in glory. **Amen.**