

Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity
Sunday, 25th September 2022



Dear Friends in Christ,

‘Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God.’ (Psalm 146: 5)

Most of us it seems, according to the viewing figures from the BBC, spent last Monday 19th September, watching the funeral of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. What a sombre, respectful, uplifting service it was as our nation gave thanks for our Sovereign Queen’s life alongside her grieving family. I thought the whole day was managed superbly well and was a credit to the many armed forces and civilian personnel, including clergy and church staff and volunteers, who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure a faultless, professional and fitting honouring of a faithful woman, who in her own life gave everything in service to us.

My thanks go to those of our own parishes who have been working equally hard since the news of the Queen’s death broke on September 8th, to organise the respectful lowering of our flags and ensuring we have been able to come together at services and acts of remembrance to pray and give thanks for Her Majesty’s long and gifted life. My particular thanks go to our bell ringers who began the tolling of muffled bells on the day of the Queen’s death, expressing the sorrow and sadness we all felt, and for their joyful ringing last Saturday as King Charles III was proclaimed as monarch. Thank you all.

Many people found great comfort in the service we held at St Mary’s, Crawley last Sunday on the eve of Her Majesty’s funeral, and have asked for my reflection, given at that service, to be made available. So, I reprint it here, with love and blessings to you all.

Jax
Rector, The Downs Benefice

Reflection on the Christian witness of Queen Elizabeth II

Following the death of Queen Elizabeth II, our nation and commonwealth has lost an exceptional leader and woman of unswerving faith. This evening we give thanks to God for her remarkable life and faithful witness. May she rest in peace and rise in glory. St Paul's command to the Philippians (Ch.4: 8) think on *'whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, whatever is worthy of praise,'* seems to describe how our Queen lived her life.

In 2015, Elizabeth II overtook Queen Victoria to become the UK's longest serving monarch, and the following year, on the death of the Thai King Bhumibol, she became the world's longest reigning monarch. A devoted mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, Queen Elizabeth has come to be the mother of our nation, which is why so many of us feel her death so profoundly.

It has been said almost universally, that the Queen was 'the epitome of humility and service, and sustained through much turmoil, both in her own life and that of the world, by her steadfast Christian faith.' Throughout her 96 years of life, 70 of which she reigned as our monarch, Elizabeth II has stood as a beacon of hope, constancy and stability in a fast changing world. In 2002, the Queen said:

'I know just how much I rely on my 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!'



Her humility, not least in times of adversity, her cheerfulness as she carried out decades of public and charitable duties at a relentless pace, and her absolute dedication to the service of the nation made her a focus of national unity and identity.

In 1947, the then Princess Elizabeth gave a speech on her 21st birthday, stating her lifelong commitment to the service of the nation – a vow she asked God to help her keep.



Following the death of her father King George VI, the Queen then made further commitments at her Coronation, including that she would faithfully serve God and the nation all the days of her life, and that to the utmost of her power, she would ‘maintain the Laws of God and the true profession of the Gospel.’ Elizabeth has remained faithful to these promises throughout her reign and was a great constant in society, providing stability during a time which saw 15 Prime Ministers appointed - and her own family often in the public spotlight for the wrong reasons. In the year 2000, Queen Elizabeth II reflected:

‘To many of us, our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ’s words and example.’

Her vocation as a Christian monarch was to work for the good of all her people and her character was shaped by the Bible and her relationship with Jesus Christ, whose own life of sacrifice, service, and compassion formed the model and inspiration for her own. The Queen consistently proclaimed the Christian gospel, which gave her strength, comfort, and peace. Who can doubt that the Holy Spirit of the God of Peace was present in the mind and in the heart of the Queen.



We saw this in so many ways, not least in her annual Christmas messages to the nation. As time went on, she became ever more explicit in her faith. In 2011, she affirmed her faith in Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour:

'Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves – from our recklessness and greed. So God sent into the world a unique person – neither a philosopher nor a general, important as they are; but a Saviour with the power to forgive. Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian Faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships, and it can reconcile divided communities.'

Elizabeth's own ministry reflected Christ's message of forgiveness as she strove in all situations to foster reconciliation. In the Christmas of 1976, Her Majesty said:

'The gift I would most value next year is that reconciliation should be found wherever it is needed. A reconciliation which would bring peace and security to families and neighbours at present suffering and torn apart. Remember that good spreads outwards and every little does help. Mighty things from small beginnings grow as indeed they grew from the small child of Bethlehem.'

And in her Christmas address to the nation in 2014, the Queen reflected:

'For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, he stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people of whatever faith or none.'

And she went on to say:

'And it is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.'

At her baptism, Elizabeth Alexandra Mary had the sign of sacrifice, the sign of the Cross marked in holy oil upon her forehead. And for ninety–six years, she offered herself, her soul and body, as a living sacrifice to God who loves her with an everlasting love.

Looking to the future, Charles III will take the Coronation Oaths. He will become Defender of the Faith. In these past days, Charles has held his grief for his beloved ‘Mama’ whilst also assuming the mantle of monarchy she left for him to bear. Let us pray that Charles will come to know the peace of our Lord Jesus in the same way as did his mother.



Queen Elizabeth II is now in her eternal home – with Philip, her sister and parents and all her faithful family and friends ... and maybe even a few corgis. Most importantly, she is home with Jesus, her Lord and Saviour. May she continue to teach us and guide us by her example in faith, and be our role-model into the way of peace.

God Save the King!

Collect Prayer for the Fifteenth Sunday after Trinity

God, who in generous mercy sent the Holy Spirit
upon your Church in the burning fire of your love:
grant that your people may be fervent
in the fellowship of the gospel
that, always abiding in you,
they may be found steadfast in faith and active in service;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen.



Luke 16: 19 – 31 - The Rich Man and Lazarus

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.'

'No, father Abraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'



Pet Service at Woodman Close Green, Sparsholt this Sunday at 10am – come one and all, with real live animals or soft toys!!!