

Sunday 11th September

The death of Queen Elizabeth II

Lamentations 3.22-26, 31-33

2 Corinthians 4.16-5.4

John 6:35-40

The death of the Queen was an event that we all knew was coming and on one level we were all expecting. But on Thursday as it was announced we were, I believe, all deeply shocked and saddened.

The stream of people coming through this building over the past few days, the deeply moving messages written in the book of condolence, the floral tributes laid on the grass outside say so much about the esteem the queen was held in.

She was more than a monarch; more than a Head of State.

She was a model of dedicated and selfless service; she was an example of faithful Christian living; she was kind, generous, wise and was able to see the funny side of life.

She was loved by the whole nation. And not just our nation of course. Tributes have poured in from around the world. Tributes not just to her as a Queen, but to her as a person; as a special person.

I never met the queen, though I have seen her (in the distance!) on a couple of occasions. The one thing I remember is that she was quite a small person physically but one with a big heart to go with her enormous responsibilities.

I don't suppose that any of us have met her in a one to one way, but I am sure we all have memories, recollections, things that come to mind. Our service today is about remembering her – so lets take a few moments sharing with those around us the particular memories we have.

(one or two to be shared with all)

One thing that has stuck in my mind from what has been said over the past couple of days is her sense of fun. Prime ministers have referred to it; those closest to her have told stories about it and we have seen examples of it ourselves.

Recall the 2012 Olympic Games opening ceremony and the helicopter ride with James Bond culminating in the parachute jump. Kept secret from just about everyone until the opening night

Or remember this – just a few months ago at her platinum jubilee

In church we show the video clip of an unusual tea party

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UfiCa244XE>

She will be sorely missed

(end of part 1)

(part 2)

The Queen's sense of fun was an integral part of who she was and I am sure it is right to remember the lighter side of her life.

But far more important, far more significant and far more influential was her Christian faith. Just a few months ago as we were celebrating her platinum jubilee, I reflected on her Christian faith. I am not sure there is much to add to those words today.

Back in 1952 her father King George VI had died and she – just a young woman at the time - was next in line for the throne. We can hardly dare to imagine what was going through her mind.

Grieving for her father, at the same time as anticipating this huge role she was about to take on as Head of State. Apprehensive, fearful even.

She knew she could only fulfil the tasks before her with the help and power of God.

She asked the nation in her first Christmas broadcast as queen, prior to the coronation

Pray that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve him all the days of my life.

Like countless millions across the ages she placed her life into the hands of God – taking Jesus as her example and her pattern and being strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Living a life of love and service, following in the footsteps of Jesus. Never afraid to acknowledge the power of God in her life.

I am sad today. But I am not sad for the queen. I know that she is now in the full presence of the God she served throughout her life. She is where she always had confidence she would be – fully present with God. The certain hope the apostle Paul talked about in that reading from 2 Corinthians is now a reality for her.

But I am sad for our loss.

We have lost a great head of state and a wonderful model of faith and life.

And as we look back with thankfulness at her life; as we praise God for her example of love and service perhaps we also find ourselves looking forward with ... uncertainty perhaps; maybe even with concern.

It is a new era. For me and I guess for many of us – the Queen is the only head of state we have known. She has always been there.

In the House of Commons on Friday Liz Truss described the Queen as *the rock on which modern Britain has been built*.

In the same debate Keir Starmer said

When everything is spinning, a nation requires a still point, when times are difficult, it requires comfort, and when direction is hard to find, it requires leadership. The loss of our Queen robs this country of its stillest point, its greatest comfort, at precisely the time we need those things most.

And now ..

And now a new King. In the same week as a new prime minister.

Its really not surprising we are uncertain and maybe more than a little concerned. For our nation and for ourselves.

But the Bible readings we heard read today give us hope for our future. The God that was always alongside the Queen is still with us today and into the future.

In Lamentations we read –

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.*

Although it may seem that the world is changing and that we are without the Queen who was, no doubt, that fixed point for us all, the scripture reassures us that God does not change. His love is constant; his mercies everlasting; he will never let us down.

The gospel reading makes a similar point. Jesus says

I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

He assures us that he will always be with us, always sustain us, always be sufficient for us if we trust in him.

So as we look into what is in many ways an unknown future we can have confidence in the God who walked alongside the Queen, and who promises to walk alongside us. We can be encouraged that just as he never let her down, he will never let us down. And we can be sure that his love will always surround us and shine through us as it did for the Queen.

I finish these few thoughts by quoting from the Queen who said ..

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 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.

May we likewise draw strength from our faith and from the Christian message of hope.