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Luke 15: 1-10

The Death of our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth II

Today, three days after the death of Queen Elizabeth, and only three months since the celebrations of her platinum jubilee, we gather, bound by a common affection and admiration for the late queen, and with a sense of loss at her passing. Anyone under 70 will not have known another monarch.

After her uncle's abdication she came to realise that someday she would become queen. That responsibility came to her much earlier than she might have expected.

At the age of 21 she committed her life to public service in a radio broadcast to the Commonwealth. Four years later she came to the throne, in post-war Britain. At her coronation she was anointed with oil imbued with exotic spices, echoing previous coronations and the Biblical anointing of leaders.

That anointing, before God, coupled with her coronation vows to be guided by law, justice and mercy, marked a shift in her life. Her commitment at aged 21 was now made once more, but this time before God and her people, to be set apart for her unique role of service to others as a constitutional monarch.

We know, from words she spoke in her Christmas Day broadcast in 2014, that her faith was so important to her and guided and informed her in her service to the nation and to the countries of the Commonwealth. In that speech she said, "For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, ... 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."

The queen's dedication to the pledge she had made, during these past 70 years, never wavered. In times of joy and celebration as well as in years of trial and tribulation for the Royal Family she remained true to her pledge. The queen was not protected from the sorrows of family divorces, bereavements and even house fires. I feel confident in saying that her faith must have been a source of comfort in those more difficult times.

In my mind's eye I see her sitting alone in St George's chapel in Windsor at the funeral of Prince Philip. A picture of grief born with dignity, neither asking or wanting special privilege or favour during the COVID lockdown. The integrity of that decision and the strength to follow through with the funeral service in the full glaze of a world-wide television audience speak volumes about the queen's character. A true servant leader of the people, who fully understood the cost of the role she had promised before God to fulfil.

Five days ago the queen undertook her last constitutional duty of accepting the resignation of one Prime Minister and appointing another. She may have looked physically frail, but the pictures show a happy glint in her eyes and a sense of a bright mind still at work.

Since her death we have seen the formal accession being played out. The continuity is an essential part of the process of death and life, and is a lesson to us all. Personally, I have found it difficult to say, "the Queen is dead, long live the King". It felt heartless and as if the previous monarch was of no consequence. But of course, that is not the case; it is the exact opposite. Because of the role of monarch

having been undertaken in such a diligent, careful, and focussed way, the accession becomes an essential next step. It is as if Charles is part of a resurrection story; a continuation of all that was good.

Today's assigned gospel reading has some relevance to what has unfolded. In Charles' speech after he arrived in London from Balmoral, he spoke of his hopes that his son would 'bring the marginalised into the centre ground where they can receive help'. With those words and the sentiments behind them it's clear that Charles has faithfully received the message from his mother's work and will be seeking in his own role and through the work of his son, ways of reaching beyond the fold and embracing the lost.

So, as we pause and reflect on the life of our sovereign lady, Queen Elizabeth, today we can give thanks for the life of devotion to God and to all her people across the world for over 70 years as monarch. We give thanks for her example of service, inspired, and nourished by faith in our lord Jesus.

Let us give thanks to God for the life she lived.

Rest eternal grant unto Elizabeth O Lord, and let perpetual shine upon her.

Let us pray.

Go forth upon your journey from this world, dear child of God,
Into the hands of the Father who made you,
To find life in Christ who redeemed you,
To rejoice in the Spirit who renews you.
May the heavenly host sustain you
And the company of the redeemed enfold you;
May peace be yours this day,
And the heavenly city your home.

May she rest in peace and rise in glory.
Amen