

The late Queen Elizabeth and her relationship with Christ

There has been an outpouring of grief with the death of our longest reigning monarch Queen Elizabeth. I have sat glued to the television watching events unfold since her passing, in one way half expected at some time given her age, but a shock none the less having seen her with Liz Truss on the Tuesday. She has always been there during my lifetime, a constant figurehead, reassuring and comforting. I was thrilled to see her on one occasion back in the mid seventies when I was teaching in a huge comprehensive school in Bracknell. She came to the town centre, near Sainsburys, to open a sensory garden. People were crowded together like sardines, waving flags and trying to get a glimpse of her. That was difficult as she was quite a tiny person physically. However on that particular day she was wearing a bright green outfit with matching hat so your eyes followed flashes of green through the melee of arms and legs. I was so delighted to have seen her albeit in a fleeting few seconds.

Her formal role was Defender of the faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England but she has always had a deep personal faith in Christianity and over the last twenty years or so she talked more openly about her beliefs. Her faith was made clear however before her Coronation. In her very first Christmas broadcast made ten months after her father's death in 1952 she said "Pray for me ... 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 and you, all the days of my life". She was crowned six months later on 2 June 1953.

The Coronation service was a deeply symbolic service. The most sacred part was when the Archbishop anointed her with oil when she was hidden from view, under a canopy, wearing a simple white dress with no jewels or crown. Prayers were said over her, inviting God's Holy Spirit to empower her to do God's work as His servant. Indeed she spent her life serving others, our nation and the Commonwealth. The Archbishop of Canterbury wrote these words, amongst others, on the day she died

"Through times of war and hardship, through seasons of upheaval and change, and through moments of joy and celebration, we have been sustained by her late Majesty's faith in what and who we are called to be"

"As a faithful Christian disciple, and also Supreme Governor of the Church of England, she lived out her faith every day of her life. Her trust in God and profound love for God was foundational in how she led her life – hour by hour, day by day.

Her Late Majesty found great joy and fulfilment in the service of her people and her God. For giving her whole life to us, and allowing her life of service to be an instrument of God's peace among us, we owe her a debt of gratitude beyond measure."

I think it is well worth reflecting and thinking quietly about some parts of her Christmas messages as these can tell us more about her beliefs which many have found quite inspiring given her years and years of service. Her dedication to duty, her courage and resilience have been a blessing for all of us for over seventy years.

1992 Christmas message

This year she gave her famous “ Annus Horribilis “ speech where she thanked all those who had prayed for her, Prince Philip and her entire family, saying those friends “ whose prayers-fervent , I hope, but not too frequent – have sustained me through these years, are friends indeed “

Message 2002

“ 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. I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian Gospel”

Message 2008

She said how she had been comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who “ makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lies more in giving than receiving, more in serving than in being served”

Message 2016

The late Queen declared her faith openly in this Christmas message “ Billions of people now follow Christ’s teaching and find in him the guiding light of their lives. I am one of them because Christ’s example helps me to see the value of doing small things with great love, whoever does them and whatever they themselves believe”

In 2020 when she was isolating in Windsor castle with Prince Philip during the Covid -19 pandemic she referred once more to the Good Samaritan story “ This wonderful story of kindness is still as relevant today. Good Samaritans have emerged across society showing care and respect for all, regardless of gender, race or background, reminding us that each one of us is special and equal in the eyes of God “

The late Queen wrote the forward of a Bible Union book “ The Servant Queen and the King she serves” She quoted the poem used by her father King George VI in his 1939 Christmas Broadcast , just after the start of the Second World War

I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year

“ Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown”

And he replied, “ Go out into the darkness , and put your hand into the hand of God

That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way” .

In the booklet the late Queen wrote this “ 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 peoples of whatever faith or none”

Let us join The Most Reverend and Right honourable Justin Welby in saying quietly and reflecting on his words

May Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II rest in peace and rise in glory