**1th September 2022**

**Commemoration Service for the late Queen Elizabeth II**

WE come together at a time of national mourning due to the sad news of the death of our Queen.

We come together to give thanks to God for her life and her service to the nation. We come together to pray for our new king, King Charles and to pray for our nation at this time of grief and loss and transition.

We gather together in this church, in the faith that Queen Elizabeth shared and which she described as her anchor and guide. We come believing that indeed flights of angels sing her to her rest.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life; she who believes in me,

though she dies, yet shall she live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall

never die.

*John 11.25,26*

I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor

things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor

anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of

God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

*Romans 8:38,39*

**HYMN O God our help in ages past**

**Let us pray**

Almighty God, our Queen is dead,
her long life is over
but You live forever!

Our Queen is dead,
her long reign is over
but You reign forever!

Our Queen is dead,
her loving service is over
but Your love lives forever!

We give You thanks
that in Your life, she shaped her life;
under Your sovereignty, she fashioned her reign;
in Your loving heart, she found wisdom and peace.

Forgive us when we didn't follow her example,
nor recognized the power of humble, Christlike service.
Strengthen our resolve to find our home in Your heart
and to live with wisdom, humility and grace.

Lord,
Your kingship surprises
for it is found in a manger and on a cross
and in this light all earthly monarchs
may find the wisdom to rule
as Your servant, Elizabeth, did so memorably.
Enable us to value her ministry
in the way we serve one another
that she who reigned over us may live gloriously with You.
through Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord – Amen

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Personal tributes**

The Queen of England, Elizabeth II has passed away at the age of 96. The longest reigning monarch in British history showed her loyalty and servant heart throughout her 70 years on the throne.

One in three of the population have met her apparently, either personally or in the same space.

***What about you? Personal tributes.***

The Revd. Dr John Bradbury, URC General Secretary, said: “Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II lived the most remarkable life of dedicated Christian service.

“As a devout Anglican and Presbyterian her faith shone from her words and deeds. Her contribution to the life of our nations, the commonwealth, and beyond will be remembered with gratitude for generations to come. She inspired respect from across the political spectrum and from monarchists and republicans alike.

“The United Reformed Church has always been aware that as each General Assembly presents a loyal address to the throne, we have been addressing a fellow baptized sister in Christ. We give thanks for her life and uphold in prayer all who mourn for her. May she rest in peace and rise in glory.”

One Minute Silence

God, Our Father,
all through our country,
we are sad at this time,
because our Queen is no longer with us.

She will be missed by so very many,
but we know that you are looking after her.
Bless those close to her.
May they know they are remembered by us.
And bless our country at this time of change.
May we all work together as one family,
and be ready to serve others,
as our Queen served us.
In Jesus' name we ask it.
Amen.

The Queen is dead

God Save the King!

**National Anthem**

**Isaiah 6.1-5**

**Hymn The Lord’s my Shepherd**

**Reflection**

This year will be known by many as, ‘the year that Queen Elizabeth died’. Whatever we think about the institution of the monarchy, the death of our Queen has a huge impact upon us.

Her face, her presence, her being there have been part of all our lives for so many years. For most of us, she has been the only monarch we can remember. She has been part of our lives, our imaginations, our sense of who we are.

I read a number of letters in the newspaper yesterday and they said the Queen was like there mother. Born in the same era, living through the war, sharing that sense of dignity, duty and service and the great skill of listening. One writer said ‘As I absorbed the news I cried for my mum for the Queen and for the loss of a generation from whom we have so much to learn’.

Another writer said that ‘in some way a very strong mother figure has left his life. The Queen occupied the extraordinary position of monarch while to so many of us also occupying a very personal place in our hearts and minds’. We knew her, and yet we didn’t know her. She was a constant in a world of change.

The writer of this Bible passage from the book of Isaiah shared this experience of the death of a monarch, after a reign of many years. It is probably no co-incidence that it was in this year, the year that King Uzziah died, that he had an experience of the ground shaking beneath him, when the Temple shook and he felt lost.

Many of us now will also feel dislocated and shaken up, in ways we can’t quite describe and perhaps hadn’t expected.

But the monarch whose reign has just ended in our own land would be the first to say that the God whom she worshipped, and to whom she committed her life in service, the God in whose name she was anointed in a holy place, this holy God, is with us, and the whole earth is filled with God’s glory.

There are those who would say that what she provided above all was a kind of stability and reassurance. When times were painful and difficult for us as a nation, she was there. She always sought to comfort the suffering and to steady the anxious. Even recently during the pandemic her simple words ‘We will meet again’ brought comfort and hope to those deprived of seeing loved ones during lockdown. Pictures of her sat on her own at her husband’s funeral aroused the nations sympathy and arguably contributed to the downfall of the last prime minister who unwisely was having parties in Downing Street.

The new prime minister Liz Truss described her as the Rock of the Nation but the Queen in her humility always pointed away from herself to the true Rock of Ages, the Lord Jesus Christ. Some have described her as the best evangelist we have had in recent times with her open Christian faith, never overstated but never underplayed.

Above all, her own faith in God was sure and strong. If you have seen the TV series The Crown, it would have you believe that the Evangelistic rallies of the 1950s led by Billy Graham was a key turning point for her in her faith.

In his book Just as I am, Billy Graham spoke of the support she'd given to him and his work: "Her official position has prevented her from openly endorsing our Crusade meetings.

"But by welcoming us and having me preach on several occasions to the royal family at Windsor and Sandringham, she has gone out of her way to be quietly supportive of our mission."

Billy Graham was even invited to listen to the Queen practice her Christmas message as she wanted his thoughts on her message one year.

He would later vow to pray for her and her family every day.

A deeply private woman, it was rare to hear the Queen being interviewed or speaking candidly about her life. But the general public got a brief glimpse into her thoughts and faith during the annual Christmas broadcasts, when she regularly referred to Jesus Christ.

In December 2000 during her Christmas Day speech, she said: “For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life.”[[1]](#endnote-1)

In 2008 the Queen said: “I hope that, like me, you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing, unselfish and sacrificial life. He makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving; more in serving than in being served.”

While in her 2014 message, she said: “[Jesus Christ] is 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.”

She often referred to the teachings of Jesus when it came to relationships and forgiveness. In 2011 she said: “Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God’s love.”

In 1989 the Queen used Jesus’ story of the Good Samaritan to illustrate her encouragement that we should love one-another. She said: “It’s not very difficult to apply that story to our own times and to work out that our neighbours are those of our friends, or complete strangers, who need a helping hand. It would be splendid to think that in the last years of the twentieth century Christ’s message about loving our neighbours as ourselves might at last be heeded.”

Her Royal Highness worshipped privately every Sunday and regularly spoke of the power of prayer. In her first Christmas speech broadcast in 1952, the Queen asked her subjects to lift her up in prayer to God. 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.”

The Bishop of London Sarah Mullally wrote, “She was a woman of faith. In her 2014 Christian broadcast, the queen described Jesus Christ as ‘an anchor in my life and a role model’. In a nation where faith is often contended and sometimes despised, she made no excuse for her own faith. And she did not hide it. On the contrary, it was the engine of her devotion to service.

“In an age that is, on one hand, increasingly secular, and on the other, fraught by religious conflicts, her approach was winsomely inclusive. She was the head of the Church yet in her speeches, she never tells anyone to go to church. Rather, she pointed to Jesus and how he expanded her capacity to love people with different beliefs. Overall, her approach has been testimonial, not argumentative. She told the world about the inspiration that Jesus had been for her in her own life and left others to decide if they were interested in being inspired themselves.”

We know the coronation oaths date back centuries and were polemical and pointed – after civil wars and a break with Rome the defender of the faith and upholder of the Protestant faith also was known as the Head of the Church. Our ancestors in the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches took exception at the king being the Head of the church.

Later this afternoon I shall be inducted as minster at Rodborough tabernacle and the Nature Faith and Order of the United Reformed Church will be read out including this section:

We believe that
Christ gives his Church a government
distinct from the government of the state.
In things that affect obedience to God
the Church is not subordinate to the state,
but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ,
its only Ruler and Head.
Civil authorities are called
to serve God’s will of justice and peace for all humankind,
and to respect the rights of conscience and belief.

Oliver Cromwell was a Congregationalist. We didn’t believe some people were more divinely approved than the rest of us, but that God inspired anyone who was open to the work of the spirit. Our tradition has always been somewhat critical of divine right monarchs - as we know scripture is.

From the outset God did not want Kings. In the first book of Samuel the Israelites ask God for their first King. God says in 1 Samuel 8, you want a king because you want to reject me. If you make a man a king, he will take your sons and make them serve him, he will take the best of your vineyards and farmlands and a tenth of your grain – in other words the monarchy will establish a hierarchy – which is OK for those at the top- but the mass of you will be at the bottom. God says I’m not happy about that. But the Israelites say we want a King so we can be like the other nations. God gives them a king. I think God is a republican! It is a little ironic therefore that we ask God to save our Queen and bless our monarchy!

Not for nothing we have been known as Dissenters, Non-Conformists. But we recognise the important role the monarch plays as the head and symbol of our state. We are loyal dissenters.

There are calls for the coronation vows to be updated to reflect the multicultural and multi-faith nature of Britain today and a serious discussion about the established role of the Church of England. No doubt those arguments will be aired over the next year.

The Queen herself was inclusive and never critical of others’ beliefs.

The Bishop of London continues:

“Wonderfully, Her Majesty the Queen’s example to the world has not been a dour, dutiful drudge, but of a woman who seemed to enjoy life – riding and horses and dogs and family. She didn’t have to invite a different Christian minister every weekend of her six-week Balmoral holiday to spend time with her family, but she did. She didn’t have to drive herself to the Sunday service in church on the Sandringham Estate when she was there, but she often did. She didn’t have to find out the names of the Sunday school prize winners and choose and present their prizes, but she did.

I remember John Bell telling me of his visits to Balmoral and how the Queen was so down to earth, conversational and the life of the soul of the party. The Queen and Princess Anne were the jokers in the castle often testing out the humour of the visiting church minister.

The Archbishop of York, Stephen Cotterell shared a humorous story this morning about staying with the Queen. This time at Sandringham:

He continued: "I had preached in Sandringham parish church. We were standing outside. The Bentley was there to get the Queen, the Bentley didn't start. It made that throaty noise that cars make in the middle of winter when they are not going to start.[[2]](#endnote-2)

"Everybody stands there doing nothing. I am expecting a policeman to intervene. Nothing happens.

"Enjoying the theatre of the moment I step forward and made a large sign of the cross over the Queen's car to the enjoyment of the crowd. There were hundreds of people there - it was the Queen.

"I see the Queen out the corner of my eye looking rather stony faced at this point and I think perhaps I've over-stepped the mark.

"Anyway, the driver tries the car again and praise the Lord, the car started.

"The Queen gets in and goes back to Sandringham. I follow in another car.

"When I arrive at Sandringham as I come into lunch, the Queen with a beaming smile says 'Ah, bishop. It's the bishop. He healed my car."

However - he wasn't the only one to remember the incident.

He continued: "Two years later when I was greeting her at the west front of Chelmsford Cathedral just as a very grand service was about to start... she took me to one side and said 'Bishop, nice to see you again.

"I think the car's all right today, but if I have any problems I will know where to come'."

The Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, the Right Rev Dr Iain Greenshields was staying at Balmoral last weekend and described the Queen’s vital conversation and amazing memory and was surprised to hear news of her death on Thursday. He had brought her a gift of a holding cross, a tactile wooden cross made out of recycled church pews by prisoners at Her Majesty’s Prison Glenochil. Her leaving the room holding that cross will be my enduring memory he said.

The Queen was not only long-lived but noble. There aren’t many people today who earn almost universal respect. Nelson Mandela was one; perhaps Martin Luther King and Mother Teresa. The Queen was undoubtedly another.[[3]](#endnote-3)

In an age of superficial glamour and instant celebrity, she patiently witnessed to a deeper set of values founded on love and loyalty, commitment and self-sacrifice. She saw those values in the life of Jesus and she adopted them for herself too.

She recognised that society loses the long view when it ignores the deep one. She kept her roots in the ‘deep view’ of lasting Christian values, and could therefore play the long game of monarchy, not blown around by passing fads and fancies. You can’t slip character on and off like a change of clothes; character emerges from the consistent choices and commitments of a lifetime. And from those faith-full choices came the Queen’s noble character.

**GOD SAVE THE QUEEN** God did just that.

In the face of her death, we can depend on the God who is always with us, filling not only the temples of this world, but also our families and communities, with love and hope.

In the year that Queen Elizabeth died, we give thanks for a life of dedicated service to our nations and commonwealth. We give thanks for God’s faithful servant, Elizabeth. We pray for her family and closest friends, for those who will mourn and miss her most.

We grieve for what we have all lost. And we also take heart and hope from the faith that we shared with her and that she shared with us, remembering that death is defeated and that God reigns above all.

I think I heard it said that this hymn was one of the Queen’s favourites. It is not hard to see why:

I vow to thee, my country
All earthly things above
Entire and whole and perfect
The service of my love

The love that asks no questions
The love that stands the test
That lays upon the altar
The dearest and the best

The love that never falters
The love that pays the price
The love that makes undaunted
The final sacrifice

But it also speaks of another country

we may not count her armies
we may not see her King)
Her fortress is a faithful heart
Her pride is suffering

And her ways are ways of gentleness
And all her paths are peace

In the words of another famous hymn, Charles Wesley’s Love Divine

The Queen at last may be just an ordinary saint around the throne, where all are equal at the foot of the cross

Changed from glory into glory,
till in heav’n we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love and praise

**HYMN ; I vow to thee my country.**

**Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Let us pray
For Queen Elizabeth and her exceptional reign,
her deep affection for her people,
her lifelong desire to serve the common good,
her humility and grace, hard work and dedication,
we thank You, Living Lord.

Be with the King and members of the Royal Family
as they mourn the loss of a mother and grandmother
as well as a friend and monarch –
**in the royal palaces, crown them with Your loving-kindness.**

Be with our national leaders –
the Prime Minister and the First Minister

at this time of uncertainty and change –
**in the corridors of power, crown them with Your heavenly wisdom.**

Be with her people in nation and Commonwealth as they mourn a monarch and peace-maker
and rejoice in the cultural diversity celebrated under her reign –
**in the four corners of her realm, crown us with peace and goodwill.**

Be with the hidden folk throughout the world
who are struggling to make peace, longing for healing,
grieving the loss of someone they love –
**in pain and grief, crown the nations of the earth with the light of Your love.**

In silence, we remember with thanksgiving
the life of Elizabeth, Your servant and our Queen,
that she may rest from her labours
and rejoice in the One whom she worshipped
as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Almighty God,
whose Son, Jesus Christ, was crowned
not with gold but with thorns
and whose blood was shed
to give life to the world –
crown us with Your love
that we may serve one another
with humility and joy
and Your Kingdom come
with peace on earth,
through the same Jesus Christ
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit
ever One God, now and for evermore – Amen.

**Notices**

**HYMN: For all the saints**

**Blessing**

God grant to the living grace,

to the departed rest,

to the Church, the King, the Commonwealth and all people, unity, peace and concord,

and to us and all God’s servants,

life everlasting;

and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you and remain with you always. Amen.

1. <https://www.womanalive.co.uk/opinion/pray-for-me--that-god-may-give-me-wisdom-the-steadfast-christian-faith-of-queen-elizabeth-ii-in-her-own-words/13796.article?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=13446389_Voice%20of%20hope%2009.09.2022&dm_i=16DQ,807AT,KCOFX7,WQPPK,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/archbishop-of-york-shares-hilarious-memory-of-over-stepping-with-the-queen?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=13462686_daily%20news%2011%20September%202022&dm_i=16DQ,80JVI,KCOFX7,WS731,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.premierchristianity.com/obituaries/queen-elizabeth-ii-1926-2022-remembering-the-christian-faith-of-the-uks-longest-serving-monarch/13788.article?utm_source=Premier%20Christian%20Media&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=13446389_Voice%20of%20hope%2009.09.2022&dm_i=16DQ,807AT,KCOFX7,WQPPJ,1> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)