**In Thankfulness for The Late Queen; a life gladly lived.**

Isaiah 61.1-4

Psalm 121

Romans 8. 31-end

For more than seventy years Her Late Majesty was a constant in our lives, steadfast and unflinching in following God’s calling on her life. A life not chosen, but placed upon her. A life that lived words written by Mother Julian in this city 600 or more years ago: “The greatest honour we can give Almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of his love”.

The Late Queen brought hope in her messages to those affected by disaster; reconciliation through small symbolic acts where there had been division; comfort where there were many tears; an attentive ear to those who spent time with her; an ability to adapt and evolve, yet maintain a mystery; and a keen eye for the going at the three forty at Epsom!

In her final days last week I imagined her at Balmoral “lifting up [her] eyes to the hills” with their purple-heather haze, eagles soaring overhead, and the gentle sound of the peaty waters of the Dee carried on the wind with the scent of Scots Pine. Hers was a well-lived life, a life lived gladly, for, as the Psalmist says, the “Lord had kept [her] going out and her coming home”.

In times of tectonic shifts in geopolitics; in times of war and of peace; when faced with a terrifying pandemic; when celebrations came alive in the presence of her sparkling eyes; when daily opening her Government’s red boxes; and in times of family challenge; when always faced with a camera lens; under intense societal change; in the face of cynicism and scepticism; and during the increasing frailty of recent months as she prepared us for her departure, she remained steadfast and unflinching to her calling.

Her Late Majesty was the still centre, which is what she was anointed for at her Coronation with the “oil of gladness”. That anointing promised her grace to enable her relationship with God and the community of God’s people to live and thrive. Isaiah, writing in our first reading, spoke of the anointed binding up, proclaiming, releasing, comforting and providing. As a community we could gather around her, seeing a bigger vision of who we are than our own viewpoint, our own anxieties and prejudices allow. In her vulnerability, perhaps we learnt to treasure more the elderly in an age of youthful celebrity. In her commitment, perhaps we saw what it is to *live to serve*, in a culture of *living my life*. In her prayerfulness, perhaps we saw the glowing radiance of a life gladly lived. Her life was a constant in all our lives.

And I suspect that The Late Queen was able to be that constant because she had a constant in her life. The teachings of Jesus Christ, she said last Christmas, “have been the bedrock of my faith”. It was he, of course, who said that he had come to not to be served but to serve. The Late Queen patterned her life on him and followed in his ways.

If you're wondering why the Queen's death has affected you so much, or are feeling a sense of loss even though you never knew her, or find yourself admiring her dignity and wisdom, or something spiritual has stirred deep within you - then perhaps God is quietly inviting you to seek out the way of Jesus to illuminate your path.

I will always treasure the times that I spent alone with the Late Queen, her guidance and advice, and our handwritten notes to each other during the pandemic. It has been the utter privilege of my life to serve her in these last few years, fulfilling a Promise, in a totally unexpected way, that I made first as an 8 year old Cub Scout, and later as a Queen’s Scout, “to do my duty to God and to the Queen”. A promise I made again, in different words, kneeling before her, her hands clasped overmine, when I paid homage on becoming your bishop.

As we turn now to work out what shape and breath a contemporary duty to The King looks like, and the kind of nation and world we want him to shape with us, we come with thankful hearts to God for the life of his Mother, and we pray for His Majesty in his sacred task. With the future looking difficult, with “trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword”, in the words of St Paul to the Romans, not far away, we are assured that “neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As we face those challenges with our new King, I am reminded of the certificate signed by The Late Queen that every Queen’s Scout was given. Her message concluded, “I wish you every success on your journey through life; may it be a joyous adventure”.

Another who lived life as a joyous adventure was an evacuee, a refugee, a one-time prisoner, who liked marmalade sandwiches, and tried to have the very best manners at tea. He said, just three months ago and really on behalf of us all, “Thank you Ma’am, for everything.”

Amen, amen.

God, save The King.