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Sermon transcript St Philip Oak Bay

9am Eucharist, 18 September 2022

Celebrant and preacher: Rev. Canon Peter Parker

Sermon starts at: 31:05

Jeremiah 8:18-9:1; Psalm 79:1-9; 1 Timothy 2:1-7; Luke 16:1-13

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ylLh0CNgvbo>

May the words of my lips and the thoughts of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in your sight, Lord our strength and our redeemer, Amen.

“I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be made for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity.” [1 Timothy 1:1-2]

For all my life, I have been either listening to or, as a priest of the

Church, offering, supplications prayers intercessions and thanksgivings for kings, queens - well in my life actually, a queen, now a king – rulers, and all in high positions. This means we have prayed for prime ministers, for U.S presidents - a lot - even leaders who have been committing horrible things against their people, like Idi Amin and Uganda, those years ago; Francois Duvalier and Haiti. Vladimir Putin: I'm sure we have all been praying earnestly for him. But in the midst of all these prayers, on a regular basis we have prayed for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

“So that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity”: it could be suggested that those prayers for many in the Commonwealth have been successful; on the other hand, the truth is being pointed out these days that the British monarchy, for whom the Anglican Church has been praying Sunday by Sunday since Thomas Cranmer compiled the first Anglican prayer book in 1549, established a quiet and peaceable life for its citizens through some very violent and oppressive colonization around the world. Many residential school survivors will tell you that adjectives like quiet, peaceable, godly, dignified, did not apply to their school experiences.

But today I think it is a good time to reflect a bit more specifically on Paul's advice and the way we have tried to follow it in regards to Queen Elizabeth II through her long reign. The fact is, Queen Elizabeth herself was open to our prayers, because she shared this Christian faith. Not as a sideline to her royal position as Defender of the Faith or head of the Church of England, but because of her own personal convictions. Her service to us in the Commonwealth was as service to Christ, not because it came with her position, but because of the conviction of her heart, and I know this.

The last time she visited Victoria, there was a morning prayer service at the Cathedral. At that time I was an active Canon of the cathedral. I even had a chair in the cathedral which was on the “stage left-hand” side, the epistle side, looking down at the nave, about 40 feet from where Her Majesty was seated and looking directly at her. We got to the point in Morning Prayer which was the reciting of the Apostles Creed, and we were all following the service carefully in our booklets which had been handed out to everybody in the cathedral, which was packed. I thought, “I know this bit,” so I put my order of service down and I raised my head so I could proclaim my faith. I saw this vast sea of heads and hats following carefully in their booklets, but there's one pair of eyes that was looking straight up. We made eye contact - I wasn't sure I was allowed to, but we did, and I couldn't help smiling, and she smiled back. I am quite certain that smile shared was a smile of the joy of knowing our own faith. This was our story: we knew who we were: this was our faith.

All through her ministry, Queen Elizabeth was not hesitant, though she was always very measured and respectful in sharing her faith in Jesus Christ and the teachings of Christ. I don't know if you noticed, but it was only after I typed that sentence that I realized I had said not through her *reign* but through her *ministry*, and I decided to leave it without correcting it, because on reflection she was as much a pastor to the nations as she was a ruling monarch. So how easy and how natural it was for us, therefore, to pray regularly for Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and all the Royal Family, some of whom of course needed our prayers more than others. She was praying for us at the same time.

In Ephesians we read, “Slaves, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling and singleness of heart, as you obey Christ: not only while being watched and in order to please them, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.” It's odd to suggest that a woman who was Queen might have been thought of as a slave, but I don't think it is a stretch to see that Her Majesty acted in her role as if she were a slave: not to please people, though she was surrounded by millions who looked to her to please them; I think she saw herself there as head of state, a slave to the role and the position, but there to please Christ, not her masters.

That's the prayer we want to offer for every ruler in high place, that they are filled with the grace to please Christ first. It is the prayer we would offer for one another and for all our sisters and brothers on the planet: to serve Christ first as surety, to follow the ways of justice and mercy, to care for all God's creatures, to care for the planet itself. Whatever our position, whomever we serve in the world's terms, we serve them as if we were serving Christ - and yes, this includes our service to the planet.

Here's a thought, somewhat controversial thought perhaps, but one that has been expressed before: just suppose we were to agree that the risen body of Christ includes, and is continuous with, the entire created cosmos, including this earth on which we walk, so that everything we do to the planet we do to Jesus? Might we then be moved to change our polluting ways and repent of the harm we are doing to the body of Jesus? to reduce our damaging footprint on the earth because we would be walking not on a lump of rock in space but on the body of Christ? A number of contemporary theologians have begun to suggest this view.

If we entertain this idea even theoretically, I think we might suddenly find ourselves in the shoes of the dishonest manager in today's Gospel reading. As stewards of the earth, we are being called to account, and we're way behind in our accounting for this planet: the floods, fires, and droughts, the rising sea level and water temperatures, melting ice caps, surely tell us that. we're falling too far behind. The scientists are telling us. The Paris Accord agreed to limit the rise to in temperature to 1.5 degrees by 2050. The science scientists are now telling us that would be survivable, but hotter than that we're not so sure. And they're now telling us that we're on track to reach that rise in temperature in less than 10 years, unless we take dramatic worldwide action on fossil fuels, deforestation, and energy use. Business as usual will bring us to the extinction of all life: that's clear, and we are being called to account.

So when he was called to account, what did the dishonest steward in the parable do? Well, he took quick and clear action to make compromises, and even though those compromises affected his master's business and worth, he was praised by that master. Can you see the parallels, that we can make similar compromises? We haven't got much other option left: though the Earth is already damaged, we have the ability to change quickly the ways that we repay our debts to the environment.

Jesus, in giving the parable, concluded with the ultimate moral of the story you cannot serve God and your personal wealth. The Greek verb in that verse we translate “serve” is the same verb related to the noun “slave” if you're going to be slaves to the right master, it will have to be to Christ, which means to his whole creation . We cannot be slaves to the wealth we continue to accumulate and claim to be slaves to Christ, especially if this planet is part of the body of Christ.

And now we see the vital importance of that new part of our baptismal covenant, “Will you strive to safeguard the integrity of God's creation, and respect, sustain, and renew the life of the Earth?” I kind of wish we had a baptism every Sunday, if for no other reason that we might hear that line over and over again. This is what a faithful servant of Christ does, not simply because we need the Earth, but because we are serving the one in whom we believe. We do it not because it comes with our position, but because it is the faith in our hearts.

As our late Queen lies in state, we can say, thank you Your Majesty for that example of faith and service, first to Christ and then to all around us. And we shall continue to pray for our King and all those in high estate, that the people of this Earth might live in peace and godliness. Amen.