

SOLEMN EVENSONG IN REMEMBRANCE OF HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II
St. James Church Vancouver BC
Sermon Notes
October 16, 2022

Like millions of others around the world we watched coverage of our late Queen's funeral. Bringing together royal customs with the precision of military pageantry underscored by ceremonies of the Church of England made for an impressive and moving ceremony. Who will ever forget her late Majesty's crown on her coffin in a gun carriage pulled by British sailors, or the soaring beauty of the music in Westminster Abbey?

But, of course, the combination of these three forces—monarchy, military and religion have also been a lethal force in the process of colonization here and throughout the world. The crown's interests, aided with military might and the missionary zeal of the church too often trampled over territories here and elsewhere, imposing culture, religion, and values foreign to the people of the land.

While the length of our late Queen's reign was era defining, so was her presiding over the final stages of the decline of the former British Empire as it transitioned into the more benign Commonwealth. Not an Empress like her grandmother Victoria, Queen Elizabeth had to find new ways to be a person of influence as she exercised her responsibilities. In Canada, where she visited more often than any other country in the commonwealth, she ceded much royal prerogative when, in 1982 she signed our constitution with its charter of rights and freedoms.

Throughout her time as Queen of Canada, she kept herself distant from politics to become a unifying force within Canadian society, respected by settler and immigrant Canadians as well as many indigenous communities who are no strangers to the tradition of hereditary families. How long the constitutional monarchy will continue here now that she has gone from us is an open and very complicated question.

Christians, given our heritage from our Jewish ancestors, have a complex relationship with the idea of monarchy. King David's reign over Israel is viewed as a golden age—but Holy Scripture does not shy away from describing the David's moral failures. His son and successor Solomon, in the passage from 1 Kings we heard earlier, prayed to be given by God *a wise and discerning mind*—wisdom and discernment seen as amongst the greatest gifts that could be bestowed upon a sovereign.

A wise and discerning mind was certainly a gift that our late Queen was given. Rowan Williams, former Archbishop of Canterbury about her wrote this, "*When I held the role of archbishop of Canterbury, I had to meet a large number of ... leaders across the world; I can truthfully say that not one impressed me in the same way the queen did. Not one had the same degree of attentiveness, un pompous clarity of mind and response, lack of prickly or defensive reactions. She could be abrupt; she could be caustic; she had a powerful sense of the absurd and*

a real impatience with clichés and flannel. Yet her profound kindness was always in evidence, and her dry and deflating humor was a great gift in keeping matters in perspective.”¹

So paradoxically, when you strip away the trappings of royal privilege, take away the might of the army, and even the too often puffed-up pretensions of church, what you’re left with is the humanity of this person who occupied this role for 70 years. And it was her humanity and her kindness that deeply endeared her to us. We watched as she raised her children while continuing with her work. We saw her as a daughter and a sister with all the complexity of those family roles. We identified with her through her *annus horribilus* as she helplessly watched not only the fire at Windsor Castle but also the breakdown of the marriages of her children. We watched too as she struggled to find words and place when Diana was killed and saw how, in her own way, she rose to the occasion. And then we felt her heartbreak at the death of her beloved husband Prince Philip and were deeply saddened to see her sitting alone at his funeral in St. George’s Chapel Windsor, isolated from her family because of pandemic restrictions. Finally, we found ways to rejoice at her platinum jubilee—even though failing health kept her from making many public appearances. Somehow, although no one said it out loud, we kind of knew that having long reigned over us, her time on earth was drawing a close.

Reflecting on her death and her life weeks now after her meticulously planned and perfectly executed funeral, it’s not the pageantry in her death or her life that stays, it’s her humanity, her commitment to service, her wisdom and discernment. For 69 years her Christmas addresses rooted her values within the Christian story. In her last address, she said this,

“Despite being displaced and persecuted throughout his short life, Christ’s unchanging message was not one of revenge or violence but simply that we should love one another. Although it is not an easy message to follow, we shouldn’t be discouraged; rather, it inspires us to try harder: to be thankful for the people who bring love and happiness into our own lives, and to look for ways of spreading that love to others, whenever and wherever we can.”²

Even though she lived a life of incomparable privilege and wealth, she was not immune to the sufferings of the human heart and held fast to a faith that helped define her character and gave her the wise and discerning mind for which she was well known. Jesus’s teaching in the beatitudes was not far from her life experience: she knew what it was like to be poor in spirit, to mourn, to be a peacemaker, to hunger and thirst for justice, to be merciful and even to be reviled and persecuted. Set apart the particular role she inhabited for so long, she was respected more for her service, steadfastness, and kindness than for her royal prerogative. In so many ways she was blessed indeed.

As we mourn her death and celebrate her life there’s a verse Shakespeare’s play *Cymbeline* which comes to mind:

¹ <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/09/queen-elizabeth-servant-of-god>

² <https://www.nationalworld.com/news/uk/queens-christmas-message-in-full-elizabeth-ii-reflects-on-her-grief-in-personal-address-3507299>

*Fear no more the heat o' the sun,
Nor the furious winter's rages;
Thou thy worldly task hast done,
Home art gone, and ta'en thy wages:
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimneysweepers, come to dust.*

Thanks be to God for the life, service, and witness of our late Queen Elizabeth II. May her rest be in peace and her dwelling place in the paradise of God.

Preached by the Very Reverend Peter G. Elliott

