



Sermon by the Right Reverend John R. Stephens
Choral Eucharist in Commemoration Her Late Majesty Elizabeth the
Second, September 25, 2022

When King George VI died on February 6, 1952, newspapers around the world proclaimed: "The king is dead, long live the queen!" The young princess Elizabeth was on a royal tour in Kenya at the time and hastened her return to England. And after a long delay, on June 2, 1953, the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II took place at Westminster Abbey. And she would reign with a wisdom, compassion and kind-heartedness that won many hearts as she became both foundation and pinnacle to the United Kingdom, countries of the commonwealth and places far beyond. Today we recognize that about a week ago, once more, she returned to Westminster Abbey but for a final time; not to mark a beginning, but an ending... at least an ending in this world. But she has left an indelible mark on the history of the planet, an impression that will stay with us for countless years to come.

Queen Elizabeth was of course to reign for more than 70 years which has been described in many places. It seems fitting to hear from several people who have recently offered comment on her life:

The Archbishop of Canterbury said, "As deep as our grief runs, even deeper is our gratitude for Her Late Majesty's extraordinary dedication to the United Kingdom, her Realms and the Commonwealth. 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."

Former Prime Minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney said, “She was extremely intelligent, a woman of impeccable judgement, resolute, selfless, witty, and kind.”

The prime minister of Australia, Anthony Albanese, said, “This is a loss we all feel... In her seven remarkable decades on the throne, Her Majesty was a rare and reassuring constant amidst rapid change. Through the noise and tumult of the years, she embodied and exhibited a timeless decency and an enduring calm.”

As a result, memorial services are being held all around the globe, to celebrate and honour the life of one who was a servant and a leader with a gracious presence. I was in the Philippines when I received news of the death of Queen Elizabeth. There was sadness experienced and expressed there as well, as preparations were made for a service at the cathedral in the Anglican diocese I was visiting. She had that kind of influence the world over and left an enormous impact on the lives of so many who met her. She influenced lives from the rich to the poor, the famous and the infamous. She had deep empathy for others, was well informed of the activities in the world and wanted to make all societies abundant and compassionate.

Here in this country, it needs to be noted that the relationship between the Crown and the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples was flawed. The results of colonialism, seen most clearly in residential schools continues to be a scourge for the Crown, the churches, and the government of this land. We need to acknowledge this today but also to have hope in the words of our Governor General, Mary Simon, who has commented that the Queen started dialogue with Indigenous people has much hope in Charles III for a new relationship and a renewed commitment toward reconciliation.

The Queen was a woman of deep compassion and was fully aware that the world needed to be different. At the height of the pandemic of recent times, the Queen offered these words: “Across the Commonwealth and around the world, we have seen heart-warming stories of people coming together to help others, be it through delivering food parcels and medicines, checking on neighbours, or converting businesses to help the relief effort.

“And though self-isolating may at times be hard, many people of all faiths, and of none, are discovering that it presents an opportunity to slow down, pause and reflect, in prayer or meditation.”

She said, “Today, ... many will feel a painful sense of separation from their loved ones. But ..., we know, deep down, that it is the right thing to do. While we have faced challenges before, this one is different. ... we join with all nations across the globe in a common endeavour, using the great advances of science and our instinctive compassion to heal. We will succeed - and that success will belong to every one of us.

“We should take comfort that while we may have more still to endure, better days will return: we will be with our friends again; we will be with our families again; we will meet again.”

This past summer all of the bishops of the Anglican Church around the world were invited to meet for the Lambeth Conference. It was common for a member of the royal family to speak at the conference. With the Queen's health a concern at that point, she wrote a letter rather than be physically present. This is part of what she wrote: As we all emerge from the pandemic, I know that the Conference is taking place at a time of great need for the love of God – both in word and deed.... We also live in a time when the effects of climate change are threatening the lives and livelihoods of many people and communities, not least the poorest and those less able to adapt and adjust... the environment is a cause close to the heart of my late husband and carried on by The Prince of Wales and the Duke of Cambridge.

“Throughout my life, the message and teachings of Christ have been my guide and in them I find hope. It is my heartfelt prayer that you will continue to be sustained by your faith in times of trial and encouraged by hope at times of despair.”

Her faith was the ground on which all else proceeded. A deep and sustaining trust in the hope and love of God. A trust that we have a higher calling. A belief that there is more to this life than just what we observe and that there is life beyond the grave. She had an inspiring faith in the life to come as promised in how she understood the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As the queen, Elizabeth was the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. And for her this was not just a title. Her faith, and the faith of others, whether Christian or other religions or none was of enormous concern to her. Her faith guided her, and she knew the support of prayers from the Church of England and around the world.

In our Canadian Book of Common Prayer, we have prayed for more than 70 years:

“Most heartily we beseech thee with thy favour to behold our most gracious Sovereign Lady, Queen ELIZABETH; and so replenish her with the grace of thy Holy Spirit, that she may alway incline to thy will, and walk in thy way: Endue her plenteously with heavenly gifts; grant her in health and wealth long to live; ...and finally after this life she may attain everlasting joy and felicity; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*”

By faith we acknowledge that this prayer has been fulfilled. Today as we continue our prayers for Queen Elizabeth II, may God continue to bless, hold and keep her even now. May she know the rest of eternal peace and the hope of the resurrection.

And as the words once again ring out, the Queen has died, long live the king! May we too, as we honour her majesty, know God's grace and peace in our lives, now and always.