

Life of Queen Elizabeth II 1926 – 2022

Lamentations 3:22-26, 31-33; 2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:4; John 6:35-40.

Ten days of National Mourning are drawing to a close with tomorrow's funeral.

My thoughts from viewing the coffin and seeing the flowers...

There have been many moving moments and images, and more tomorrow..

We have seen many **expressions of grief**, tears, shouts, singing, silence, taking photos, bowing of heads, writing of tributes, leaving of flowers.. These can all be ways to express our grief, our loss, as our emotions are stirred, but, as Christians, we do not grieve without **hope**.

Whenever we encounter death, losing a loved one or friend or a national figure, and especially in the loss of our Sovereign, we are confronted with **our mortality**, that none of us live for ever, we are mortal, and pass through this world quite quickly. For Christians these are not morbid thoughts, they are the simple reality of our existence, and we face them with **real hope** and strength, because we believe in life eternal, that there is more to life than what we experience on this earth. We believe that when we leave this world we enter into the presence of God, who created us and loves us, who through his Son has redeemed us, forgiven us and welcomes us with open arms, to rest in his peace and joy for ever. This is our Christian hope, for Queen Elizabeth and for ourselves.

As I spoke last Sunday, with many quotations from the Queen, of her own faith and trust in God, one of these was (Christmas 2002): *'I know how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take **the long view**, to give of my best in all that the day brings and to put my trust in God.'*

For her, and for us as Christians, that '*long view*' is not just the length of our lives, but **eternity**. For me, my faith compels me to a sure and certain hope in eternal life, which alters my perspective on the way I live my life now.

In today's Old Testament reading: *'The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul, 'therefore I will **hope** in him.'* (Lamentations 3:22-24)

The writer says that their hope of eternity comes from their experience of God's love in this world. So it is with us. Because I know and experience God's love now, I know that this will not end with death, but is for ever.

In today's epistle: *'So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an **eternal weight of glory** beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.'* (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

St Paul had a very robust view of eternity, convinced by his own experience of the risen Jesus Christ. We too need to be convinced by our own experience of the risen Lord Jesus. St Paul says that we see our **outer nature**, our bodies, getting older and weaker, yet in our **inner nature** we can grow stronger every day. Qualities such as the fruit of the Spirit, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (which I think Queen Elizabeth epitomised and embodied) as well as qualities such as faith, hope, courage and integrity, are not dependent on strength of mind or body, but can grow in all of us as we grow older, as we faithfully follow Jesus day by day. Our inner hope is what can sustain us.

In this world, for Queen Elizabeth and for all of us, we live lives of both joy and pain, happiness and sadness, trust and doubt, but in eternity we will be filled with the **glory of God**.

Paul uses carefully chosen words. In Hebrew, the language of the Jewish people, glory was thought to be heavy, '*weight of glory beyond all measure*' is a phrase that carries the sense of fullness, lots and lots of glory! Glory represents all that is good, and to be in the presence of God who loves us overwhelmingly.

Paul's idea is that in the life to come a person is weighed down with glory, drenched in it. In other words, it could not possibly be better! This is our hope as Christians...

Finally, in today's gospel, Jesus says: '*This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and **believe in him** may have eternal life; and **I will raise them up on the last day.***' (John 6:40)

Jesus proclaimed himself as the Way to the Father, the way to eternal life, the way into the presence of God. All who believe in him, he will raise, with himself, to life eternal. This was Queen Elizabeth's hope, this is our hope.

So, as we grieve for our Queen, let us also be sustained by our hope and trust in God, as she was throughout her life. Let us be truly thankful for her life, and for ours, and seek strength and comfort in God's eternal love for us all.