

**Address at the Service of Thanksgiving to Commemorate
The Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III & Queen Camilla
Sunday 7 May 2023, 10.30am**

The Very Revd Dr Sarah Rowland Jones LVO OBE, Dean of St Davids

Ephesians 3:14-21

Matthew 22:15-22

Yn enw'r Tad, a'r Mab, a'r Ysbryd Glân. Amen

Yesterday was the most amazing spectacle - but what was it all about? It was not the making of a King. That happened last September, on the death of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, swiftly affirmed in the proclamation of the Accession Council.

A formal Coronation is not a necessary act. Rather it's an opportunity to express what monarchy is about: a symbolic articulation of the foundations, and aspirations, of a new sovereign and his reign.

Yesterday morning on Radio 4 historian Simon Schama described coronation as 'a contract with the kingdom', and it is surely true that monarchs reign only with the consent of their people. But what happened in Westminster Abbey yesterday was far more than mere contract – a legalistic transaction to undertake no more, no less than stipulated. The service used the term of covenant, between God and king, king and people. Covenants are open-ended pledges of mutual commitment in faithfulness and loyalty, come what may.

This interweaving of God, king and people was there from the start, as the chorister gave the opening greeting that identified himself, and us too, as those living under God's reign: 'Your Majesty, as children of the Kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings.' King Charles' response situated himself within that same dynamic: 'In his name, and after his example, I come not to be served but to serve.' It's an echo of Jesus' own words, from St Matthew's gospel – words of the king of kings who is also the servant king.

This is the model of monarchy the service put before us. The Archbishop of Canterbury underlined this when he began his sermon saying 'We are here to crown a King, and we crown a King to serve.'

Such service is not easy. There were times during the liturgy when the king seemed almost overwhelmed, vulnerable and alone, burdened by the weight of all he was taking on. Who, really, would want to shoulder those responsibilities?

Yet to this we brought covenant, the mutual act, of God to us, as we give ourselves to him. The prayers, and especially the anointing, powerfully express the promises of God to enable us to live out whatever role we're called to perform or fulfil. Archbishop Justin, again:

And the weight of the task given today, Your Majesties, is only bearable by the Spirit of God, who gives us the strength to give our lives to others. With the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the King is given freely what no ruler can ever attain through will, or politics, or war, or tyranny: the Holy Spirit draws us to love in action.

Before the so-called 'homage of the people' had been dropped from the liturgy, a leading republican said: 'In a democracy it is the head of state who should be swearing allegiance to the people, not the other way around.' He had completely failed to grasp that the heart of the service was precisely a head of state making that pledge to the people and recognising it could only be fulfilled through pledging himself to God.

Drawing on the words of our second reading, we might say that yesterday Caesar rendered Caesar, himself, unto God. As it should be. The orb put into his hand made it clear: the temporal power of the globe, topped by the cross of Christ the King.

And what of us? Westminster Abbey is a long way from West Wales! But this cathedral has particular links with the monarchy through their Welsh ancestry: the tomb of Edmund Tudor,

of the Tudors of Penmynydd in Anglesey, father of King Henry VII and 16th great-grandfather of King Charles III, is here. The Reformation brought one of our quire stalls into the possession of the crown - the Sovereign's Stall, in which Queen Elizabeth sat on four separate occasions.

I hope the King will come and sit there himself before long. We know he loves this place. There was an unprecedented Welsh thread running through the service, as it wove the warp of ancient tradition with the weft of contemporary context. It made me wonder how much the new King is nostalgic for his old life as Prince of Wales. His harpist, Alis Huws, who performed at our Festival last year, played an arrangement by Karl Jenkins before the service. Bryn Terfyl, here in 2019, sang *Arglwydd trugarha* to a composition by Paul Mealor, here in March. And a verse of the *Veni Creator Spiritus*, the ancient invocation of the Holy Spirit upon those set apart by God for particular callings, such as ordination or consecration (a word also used yesterday) was also sung in Welsh.

The King and Queen's procession into the Abbey was led by the Cross of Wales, his gift to the Church in Wales on the centenary of disestablishment, which was marked in a service he attended here in 2021. The Cross is stunningly beautiful. I saw it when the Archbishop of Wales – another Welsh participant in yesterday's service – blessed it at the Governing Body meeting in Llandudno last month. On one side are embedded two shards of the 'True Cross', said to be the cross used in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, given to the King by Pope Francis - a remarkable gesture of ecumenical generosity. On the other are inscribed the words of Dewi's last sermon, 'Byddwch lawen. Cadwch y ffydd. Gwnewch y Pethau Bychain'.

During that visit in July 2021, as Prince of Wales, he spent time alone before the restored shrine of Saint David, an opportunity for quiet prayer and reflection – to root himself in Dewi's God and ours, the same God who, he prayed yesterday, will sustain him as King.

Did you join those prayers? Watching the television, did you feel like spectator or participant? If you did echo that swearing of true allegiance, for me the most important phrase was its conclusion, 'So help me God'. It is our Amen, completing the circle of covenant promise: God and king, king and people, with people and God - all of us together desiring the best for our nation, our world, our local community: all of us ready to do our part, all of us knowing this is best achieved at God's directing, through the power of God, in the redeeming love of Jesus Christ our servant king.

This was also the message in our first reading today: that God's generous gift of grace strengthens us inwardly through his Spirit. This is not merely equipping us to grit our teeth as we deliver the onerous obligations of responsibility. It is also a gift of joy. God desires we should know ourselves his beloved children; with the practical 'love in action' of Jesus Christ warming our hearts, reassuring our doubts, stirring up our courage and overflowing through us so we might be a blessing to others; just as King Charles prayed to be 'a blessing to all God's children, of every faith and conviction so that together we might discover the ways of gentleness and be led into the paths of peace.'

This is the 'service of perfect freedom' to which Scripture's words, and the King's own prayer, attest: the freedom that comes from the liberty of the Holy Spirit giving wings to our aspirations to be our best selves: to be, as our first reading put it, filled with all the fullness of God, who, by his power at work among us is able to accomplish far more than all we can imagine

So let us be joyful; let us keep the faith; and let us do the things, little or large, to which God calls us, by his grace and through the anointing of his Holy Spirit. We pray this for ourselves, and we pray this for our King:

Majestic God, whose reign knows no end,
 whose throne is justice, mercy and peace;
 bless your servant Charles our King,
 that anointed by grace he may serve us in your name
 and humbly lead us in your kingdom ways. Amen.

(Prayer by Andrew Nunn, Dean of Southwark)