

Evensong 11.9.22

It has been a momentous few days, although organisations like ours have been preparing for the event of the Queen's death for years, plans change last minute and the things that were left on the pending pile have quite quickly made themselves so obviously having needed have been paid heed to.

But without sounding like the trite old vicar that I am, life is a bit like that isn't it? We're not immortal, even though great ages and active retirements, make it appear like we are more so these days and Her Majesty the Queen seemingly managed to span history and generations. She represented, in her embodiment, modern history. Studying what seemed like dusty old text books on the Second World War in secondary school in the 80s, (and what would have only been 40 or so years after the war) - she was actually there as a young adult and lived through it. Through her father and her grandfather there was yet another connection into another age, and so the longevity and connection to the past was made real in her.

A familiar and comforting face in times of trouble and celebration – her Christmas Day message was an institution in itself and many people fixed it as an anchor to their Christmas Day celebrations as you might have done midnight mass or church earlier in the morning, although truth be told – most people were fast asleep at that point and watched it later on the repeat.

Everyone has been sharing their own stories however vague a connection they may have had, and however brief the contact, my own is here in 1982 during the visit for the Royal Maundy, one of several of her visits that she would make here to St. Davids over the course of her lifetime. I remember the preparations, the excitement of the cameras and the commentary boxes being built, the new controversial robes and surplices that were bought for the choir – there was a fear that Wippell's the clerical outfitters had supplied us with Royal Scarlet instead of red, but all was well when it was compared and contrasted with the Beefeater uniforms and the outfits of the boys of the Chapel Royal. I remember being told to 'keep up' in a procession by a growling Queen's guard going through the pulpitum screen. My grandfather was receiving his maundy money from her that day. But I don't remember much about the Queen. She was certainly there, and all this pomp and ceremony was for her.

But what struck me most and has done on the subsequent occasions that I have met her at various military events, is how small she actually was. Tiny. And yet such majesty.

She signed my Commission into the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, and on accepting that Commission I served where I was told to – I didn't question the rationale behind the order, and I spent some considerable time in the dust of the middle east for that reason, not because she had personally phoned me up and told me to go, but that the orders were an embodiment of her authority, the Queen's majesty which I had subscribed to and made an oath of allegiance to.

So what is it, that goes beyond that which some people will say, a non-elected hereditary head of state? – and I think it is this concept of Majesty – it is that which seamlessly passes from one King to another – the personal attributes change but the 'Majesty' remains a constant – something beyond words which captures something of the hand of the divine in all of this.

In the bible, majesty is something that I expect most of us have a gut feeling about. It has to do with God's strength and glory. We might also be inclined to equate God's majesty with his greatness. Our word for majesty comes from the Latin *Maiestas* which roughly translates as greatness or dignity – but if we delve deeper into the Old Testament and to Psalm 93,

The Lord reigns, he is robed in majesty;
the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength;
indeed, the world is established, firm and secure.
2 Your throne was established long ago;
you are from all eternity.

we have a different understanding of the word majesty from the Hebrew *ge'ut* (*ge-OOt*). The standard Hebrew-English dictionary defines this word as, you guessed it, 'majesty.' It is closely related to the word translated as 'pride' (pride in the negative sense that is) and both of these words derive from a root that means 'to rise.' So, if you think too highly of yourself, then you have pride, which is not good. But when it comes to God, who is utterly great, who is the God above all other gods, then *ge'ut* is appropriate. This word doesn't convey God's pride in himself. Rather, it stands for God's reputation among people and everything about God that deserves this glory. We might get the sense of the word by saying that God's majesty is how highly he is thought of more than any other being, in heaven and on earth.

And we're beginning to get somewhere in our appreciation and understanding - now I'm not suggesting that we compare God's majesty to the monarch's, but in providing us with a sense of perspective – that it is not vain pride which drives them, but a sense of duty, a sense of being placed by divine providence into a life of service, and being governed by public opinion and the reputation with which the office is held. This is a challenge for anyone serving in the public arena and no more so for King Charles in the coming months than it was for Elizabeth our Late queen who experienced her own *annus horribilis*, but a clear understanding of God as *their* ruler, as their king, and trusting in God and in his guidance and wisdom, in all that they do and say:

The seas have lifted up, Lord,
the seas have lifted up their voice;
the seas have lifted up their pounding waves.
4 Mightier than the thunder of the great waters,
mightier than the breakers of the sea—
the Lord on high is mighty.
5 Your statutes, Lord, stand firm;
holiness adorns your house
for endless days.

And so we pray for this new Carolean era, and pray for the King's Majesty as he takes up this most weighty office; and as for our late Queen, may she rest in peace, and rise in Glory. Amen.