

**Service of Commemoration marking the death of
Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II
St George's Cathedral
Monday 19 September 2022**

A reading from the Revelation to John:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, saying, Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" And all the angels stood around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, singing, Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honour and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen." Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these, robed in white, and where have they come from?" I said to him, Sir, you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. For this reason they are before the throne of God, and worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. They will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; for the Lamb at the centre of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Revelation 7.9-17

Since first hearing the news, 11 days ago, of the death of Queen Elizabeth II, millions of words have been spoken and listened to, written and read, prayed aloud or in silence, broadcast via every media outlet from people in the United Kingdom, across the Commonwealth, and around the world.

Millions of words expressing sorrow and grief, recounting stories of the most public events of her long life and reign, history lessons of her family and the events leading to her becoming first in line to the throne on the death of her father King George VI; stories told by family members of those who lived through the years of WWII or had served alongside the young princess during the 1940s, stories of her thousands of visits and conversations with people at times of national disaster - with people in hospital, with carers, volunteers or with people across the Commonwealth; leaders, first nations peoples, community volunteers.

These millions of words are being spoken because, somehow, Queen Elizabeth was present to us all. Her death has reached into the heart of our lives and brought to the surface grief and love and the resolve with which life is lived, the foundations upon which our lives have been grounded, known, assumed, longed for.

One biographer has written, "Her story informs our story. She has been the backdrop to all our lives".

In this church and in this service, we are together in the terrain of grief, that place where everything is different. But this is also a place familiar.

We have all spoken our own words and memories over these days. For some the memories will have been that of a school child or an adult in the crowds lining the streets on one of her visits to Perth, for others simply the fact of Queen Elizabeth as part of the fabric, the background of our national life.

If you're my age it may be the memory of Monday morning assembly as the flag was raised and we sang God save the Queen, after which we recited what was called the Patriotic Declaration. "I love God and my country. I honour the flag, I will serve the Queen, and cheerfully obey my parents, teachers and the law." And for some there will be more personal memories of meetings undertaken as part of your professional or public role and duty.

But there is another word to be spoken, a last word, and that word is one which her life pointed to and rested upon and was centred in, the word of God's love, God's promise. God's presence. The promise she made as a young woman of 21 when as Princess she said, "My whole life be it long or short, shall be devoted to your service" concluded with this prayerful commitment, "God help me to make good my vow," and points in this time of mourning and farewell to the faith which lay at the very centre of Queen Elizabeth's long life. Her commitment to duty, to sacrificial service was lived within her faithful response to the God she had known all through her life. The God she chose not to displace from the centre of her life when she was crowned and as she lived her life as monarch.

One journalist writing this week spoke of the long queue of people waiting for hours and hours to enter Westminster Hall. I met Epeko, a taciturn grocery-store manager from North London, who had joined the queue at half past midnight and filed past the Queen some eight hours later. "It was a long journey," he said. He had moved to the UK from the Democratic Republic of Congo. I asked him what had gone through his mind when he came to face the Queen's coffin. "I was thinking about death," he said. "I was thinking how someone is so big and how they end up dying." I asked what he was going to do now, expecting him to say that he might lie down or take a shower. "What I am going to do," he said, "is achieve something before I die."

The great vision of heaven which the author of the reading from Revelation tells is one in which the heavenly throne, rather than being occupied by power, by riches, by one human being is occupied instead by the God who is described as both shepherd and lamb, the lamb who gave himself for the life of the whole flock, and the shepherd. The vision of heaven is a promise that Christ the good, the loving, the eternal shepherd will guide his beloved to the springs of eternal life.

This vision is one of welcome and hospitality. It's the vision of hope which is born of faith in and from the God of love. It's one way of describing the hope that life is more than now, that God's love is deeper and richer than we can imagine, and it's part of the promise that death is not the last word.

Today we can be, we can say, we can pray, I believe, alongside millions of others that in Queen Elizabeth we have seen the promise of the final word of faith and hope, of the love which St Paul described as beyond all things, the love in which all things are held together. For this life and the mystery beyond. This is God's promise. The final word. And it begs the question, what will be the final word to which we give allegiance.

Blessed are you, Lord our God, lover of souls: you uphold us in life and sustain us in death:
to you be glory and praise for ever!

For the darkness of this age is passing away as Christ the bright and morning star
brings to his saints the light of life.

As you gave light to those in darkness, who walk in the shadow of death,
so remember your servant, Elizabeth, that death may be for her the gate to life and to unending
fellowship with you; where with your saints you live and reign,
one in the perfect union of love, now and for ever. Amen.