

**The Bishop of Gloucester, the Right Revd Rachel Treweek's sermon for the
Service of Commemoration and Thanksgiving for the Life of Queen Elizabeth II**

Sunday 18 Sept

The readings from Scripture

Colossians chapter 3 verses 12 - 17

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

John chapter 15 verses 12 - 17

² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants^[d] any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Sermon

This is a sombre day as we gather on the eve of the state funeral of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, to remember, to mourn and to give thanks as we step into the future without her and as we give thanks for our new monarch, King Charles III - We hold him and all the Royal family in our prayers amid their grief.

Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II lived a life of faithful service as we have heard again and again – and it is those words of **faithful** and **service** which I want to reflect on.

On more than one occasion we have heard quoted those words spoken by Her Late Majesty the Queen in 1947 as a young princess on her 21st birthday:

"I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service"

Queen Elizabeth turned out to have a long life and she remained true to her promise of devoted service right to the end. How often in years to come will children learn of the fact that the same week she died the Queen had met with the outgoing PM and formally welcomed the new PM. A long life of service ...

Perhaps you are one of many people who have little reminders around your house of those 70 years – perhaps the coronation or the many jubilees. I still have a Silver Jubilee scrapbook from 1977 in which I stuck a paper plate and napkin from a little party I held with school friends in my garden. I remember being very disappointed that the layers of my proudly baked red, white and blue cake came out as pink, yellow and turquoise!

One of my favourite mementoes is a book produced to mark the Queens 90th birthday entitled '*The Servant Queen and the King She Serves.*' In it are some words from Queen Elizabeth II stating "I have been – and remain – very grateful to God for his steadfast love. I have indeed seen his faithfulness."

The late Queen's faithful service was rooted in God's faithfulness to her; and over the years we repeatedly heard her speak of her faith in Jesus Christ who she acknowledged in her Christmas sermon of 2012 as the one who came to earth 'to serve, not to be served' and how he restored love and service to the centre of our lives. It was from this centre that the Queen's service and faithfulness emanated - not a faithfulness rooted in the established Church of England of which she was supreme governor, but rather a faithfulness to the person of Jesus Christ whom she had personally encountered.

In those words, we heard read from John's gospel there is that extraordinary reminder that Jesus Christ the Son of God calls his followers friends - and it is evident that the Queen knew that friendship for herself.

I suspect that beyond her deep friendship with Prince Philip, friendship was not always easy for the Queen, as even those close to her always knew that they were in the presence of

the Queen. Yet I'm also sure that in her private and public prayer and worship she knew the truth of God who loved her and sustained her and had given her friendship with Christ.

I had the privilege of spending a weekend with our late Queen at Sandringham having only been a bishop for a few months. Whilst there were formalities and protocols - curtseys and correct forms of address - there was never any haughtiness in our late Queen - or a sense that she was better than anyone she was speaking with. Indeed, in every interaction I experienced or observed, she was very present to the individual and focused on them. She recognised the uniqueness of the individual. In her Christmas message in 2014 she said that 'Christ's example has taught me to seek to respect and value all people, of whatever faith or none'. (end of quote).

All this brings me to the subject of inner clothing and values.

Surely we will all remember Her Late Majesty's wonderfully bright outfits – bold dresses, jacket and matching hats – many which we are reminded of in all the photos as we remember her. Yet, it is not that outward clothing for which she will ultimately be remembered - Rather I believe that she was someone who endeavoured to clothe herself inwardly with love - and in what we saw and heard from her she was truly committed to taking to heart those words of the Apostle Paul to the Colossians – 'clothe yourself with love which binds everything together in perfect harmony.'

In 1953 when Queen Elizabeth II took her coronation oaths, with her hand upon the Bible she spoke the words 'So help me God'. I don't think they were a mere formality, but rather words spoken with deep feeling, crying out from the depth of her being for God's strength and that inner clothing of compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and love.

Those words from Paul to the Colossians resonate with those words of Jesus Christ as told by John and seem so pertinent as we remember her late majesty the Queen: 'You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last,.'

We too are invited to be part of that.

I said at the beginning that today was a day for remembering – Yet remembering becomes mere nostalgia unless it reorientates us and changes us.

I wonder what legacy will be seen in our lives which goes well beyond scrapbooks and mugs, but rather something which is part of who we are - our inner clothing.

We continue to live in a country and world, indeed in communities, where difference is too often a source of tension and division, and even hatred, war and brutality...

Yet those words from St Paul about clothing ourselves with love give us a picture of a binding together, of harmony and unity.

We have already seen how the death of Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II has brought many people together just as other landmarks in her life have done so over the years, but let it not be a fleeting moment – mere outward clothing - but rather something that makes us take notice of one another, even asking who is not present.

Those words I mentioned, spoken on our late Queen's 21st birthday, were poignantly made from Cape Town in South Africa .

In 1948, the year after the royal tour, the Nationalist Party came to power in South Africa, establishing many years of abhorrent apartheid. Of course, in years to come we were to see the events unfold which eventually led to Nelson Mandela becoming president of South Africa in 1994.

I mentioned earlier how hard it must have been for the Queen to have had real friends but interestingly Mandela was named as someone who the Queen counted as a friend. It is said that in 1991, the Queen included him in a dinner meant only for the Heads of Government. And it is said that after he became President, Mandela always referred to our late Queen as 'my dear friend Elizabeth'.

And so, I'm going to give the last quote to Nelson Mandela who once said:

"What counts in life is not the mere fact that we have lived. It is what difference we have made to the lives of others that will determine the significance of the life we lead." ..

As we give thanks for the difference Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II made to the lives of so many people in her years of faithful service, may we each reflect on what it is that will take root and grow in *our* lives that will make a difference in the years remaining to us on earth.

Amen.