

Sermon for the Service of Thanksgiving to Celebrate the Life of  
Her Late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.  
Shiplake College. Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2022

The most famous woman in the world has died.

Famous, yes, but she wasn't a celebrity. There is a difference.

She didn't court attention, although her family occasionally thrust her into the lime-light. She just was tradition, continuity, integrity, duty and service. Seeing her whole life as serving every member of this country, no-matter what position, faith or heritage.

Through her Coronation vows, following what she saw as her vocation until death, she was able to do far more than politics and politicians, Churches and Archbishops could ever do.

She was politically neutral, and that's important. But she wasn't ideologically neutral, and she drew her strength and purpose from a very particular source.

She faced the decline, and disintegration of the British Empire, and yet, as a figurehead, she was able to draw together a family of nations, united by friendship, in the form of a Commonwealth. No political figure could have done this.

On the surface of things the Monarch seems to have no power at all. Even at the Opening of Parliament the Queen's Speech, or now the King's Speech, is the reading out of the Governments plans for future policy. There must have been times when to do that would have been very difficult indeed for her.

The power of the Monarch lies in a particular sense of figurehead, a glue that binds all together, a particular set of moral values that sets the tone of our living together as a nation. Those questioned in the queue to see Her Late Majesty lying in state described why they loved her so much. The answer was a respect for her values. Values of tolerance and kindness, and again, duty and service. Part of the fear of losing her, after her constant presence for so long, is the thought that these fundamental values of our society will somehow diminish.

The other aspect of the Queen that has been a little overlooked is that she was a woman. In our own age the equality of the sexes has been wonderfully championed, but the Queen lived most of her reign in a world where that was not so. She took no nonsense from the men of her nation or any other nation.

She was quietly subversive, and tactical with great, and often humorous, tact.

In 2013 she hosted King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia at Balmoral. It must be noted that women were only permitted to drive in Saudi Arabia in 2018. The Queen suggested to the King that they had a drive around the estate. The King got into the front passenger seat and, much to his surprise, the Queen climbed into the driver's seat.

Sometimes change happens slowly and subtly. Perhaps only the Queen could have made this point to this King and, who knows, maybe it did contribute to this significant change for women in that country.

Talking of the Queen's sense of humour, here is another story. She was a great lover of sport, especially Horse Racing, but not that keen on team sports. She had to attend many Cup Finals at

Wembley and probably found them tedious. She attended the England Winning World Cup Final in 1966. At the end of the match the Chairman of the FA turned to her and asked whether she thought anyone had played particularly well. Yes, she replied, the Band of the Scots Guards.

She could also be remarkably ordinary, especially in places like Balmoral where she knew most of the people in that village. She once went to dinner with her Piper and his wife. Afterwards she washed up and he dried.

I mentioned earlier that she drew her strength from a very particular source. That, of course, much mentioned in the press and on Television, was her faith in God.

Christmas inspired her with the message of the God who comes among us in the form of a humble tiny child. She demonstrated a quiet humility in everything she did.

Easter inspired her with a spirit of self-sacrifice - the image of Jesus the Servant King giving his life for the world.

From the Queen's Christmas broadcast in 1975...

"Jesus' simple message of love has been turning the world upside down ever since. He showed that what people are and what they do, does matter and does make all the difference.... It does matter therefore what each individual does each day. Kindness, sympathy, resolution and courteous behaviour are infectious. Acts of courage and self-sacrifice ...are an inspiration to others. And the combined effect can be enormous.... We may feel powerless alone but combining the efforts of individuals can defeat the evils of our time. "

So, what do we do now?

How do we celebrate the remarkable and long life of Queen Elizabeth II ?

We take something of her example and live it out, to the benefit of others.

Acts of service, caring values, kindness and integrity. Putting the needs of others before our own.

It is true to say that Her devotion inspired devotion. Her service inspired service. Her sense of duty inspired a sense of duty.

Our prayers for Queen Elizabeth are prayers of Thankfulness. Our commitment to King Charles is to live out the example of his mother.

Well done, thou good and faithful servant: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.

Amen.