

Majestic Faith

7 May April 2023

Acts 7.55-60

Fifth Sunday of Easter

1 Peter 2.2-10

Rev. Alan Keeler

John 14.1-14

Our Crowned King and Queen

I wonder if you watched the service of coronation yesterday? There was the grand procession to the Abbey. There was the spectacular service. Afterwards there was the triumphal procession to Buckingham Palace. And then there were the appearances on the balcony of Buckingham Palace.

There was a huge congregation of several thousands in the Abbey. The path of the processions were watched in the order of hundreds of thousands. The televised service was expected to be of the order of hundreds of millions.

The title of the service was the 'Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III & Queen Camilla'. I hoped they did not suffer from stage fright. But it looked like they took all of in their stride.

The ceremony included many features. Most important there was King Charles and Queen Camilla being crowned. Also there was King Charles being anointed by oil, an act too holy to be broadcast. The Archbishop of Canterbury had made the innovation that the people could swear their allegiance which provoked some controversy.

As a member of the clergy of the Church of England swearing allegiance is a standard requirement. This happens at ordinations and taking up a new position. The words that I will now have to say would be:

I, Alan Keeler, do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King Charles III, his heirs and successors, according to law: So help me God.

Whether we are watching a rich royal pageant, or taking up a church appointment there are deep things being expressed about how we live together and how we commit ourselves. These commitments include the law of the land. Making law is very important and we cannot just make laws to suit ourselves. It is important to acknowledge there is something that binds us together and makes for the peace and justice of our society. Some people will appeal to human

rights. Some people will appeal to the will of the people. Or some will say it is about the will of God.

Living together

Appealing to law may seem dry and restrictive. But it is about seeking to be truly human. This was expressed in the splendour of a coronation service with a King and Queen. There was an Archbishop and glorious worship. So many wanted to be part of this with thousands in Westminster Abbey, hundreds of thousand watching the processions and hundreds of millions viewing the broadcast. All of it is to say our shared life including our laws expresses the great richness of community and shared hope.

Our Bible readings also gave expressions of living together. In our Gospel Jesus spoke of 'his Father's house'. He said it has many dwelling places and he has prepared a place for us.

This is frequently used at funeral services and we speak of the preparation of a place in heaven. As wonderful and true this is it is also about the Kingdom of God now. It is how we are to find life here with God and his life that gives us a true humanity in this world that he has made.

In his ministry Jesus had taken so many aspects of his people's faith and given it new life. The approach to law that the scribes and teachers had taken had made religion a burden and choked people's lives. Jesus interpreted the law afresh. His wisdom gave people a deeper understanding of God's purposes. Through forgiveness, Jesus guided people to find new life and hope when they had known sin and failure. In that passage Jesus said he was 'the way, and the truth, and the life'. With his wisdom and forgiveness he showed something of how this was possible. All of this is said shortly before his death and resurrection. Jesus knows these mighty acts will make a place in his father's house something assured for all who believe.

In Peter's first letter he uses the image of a building, a place where people live. He speaks of Jesus as a living stone. He transforms an item structure to be something that is warm, welcoming and nourishing. As Christians we share this experience of a divine dwelling place, we draw upon Christ and live with the humanity that God has always wanted.

Peter uses language that echoes the heart of the worship found in the Temple in Jerusalem. This

was a building that was to be spiritual, host sacrifices and know a holy life. Peter says that the Christian community is to be the fulfilment of these activities not just for themselves but for the world as well.

Majesty

There is a word that is used for the monarch that can be is a deep source of reflection. The title of the service yesterday was 'The Coronation of Their Majesties King Charles III & Queen Camilla'. I like the idea of majesty. However, on the one hand to call a couple of people Majestic sounds like a sort of romanticism and so rather unreal. Or we think we have to be sycophantic and fear we are going to be demeaned.

But if the monarchy is supposed to represent the nation is it a call not just for the monarchy to be majestic but for the life of the nation to be like this too. I would also say this is working out that deep insight in the Genesis creation narrative that humans, each of us, are made in the image of God. You cannot get more majestic that!

There were elections last Thursday. I wonder how many candidates offered the electorate a majestic life? Now a full human life might be in terms of practicalities like public services, taxes and law and order. But there are other issues about dignity, trust and protection of the vulnerable.

We do need a whole apparatus of politics, law and public debate. But if it is too much about economics, popularity and a few contentious issues the deep values of human life can get ignored. It is understood that the monarch should not be involved in politics. But the life of a country is not just about the *how* stuff gets done. It must also be about the *why* things are important and having values that are solid to build on.

Faiths

The coronation service was a clear expression of Protestant British faith. It was about the crowning of a new monarch who is as well as King of the United Kingdom also to be the Supreme Governor of the Church of England. This expresses our history as a particular nation and a particular church. On the one hand the coronation was an opportunity to show in word and sacrament the Christian faith. I thought the Archbishop of Canterbury spoke clearly about Jesus Christ and there was holy communion to be celebrated and admittedly received by a few of the participants.

I am sure planning the coronation service also included deep reflections about the many faith communities now in our land. It would also have taken seriously King Charles' statement some years ago about being 'Defender of Faith.'

It was deeply moving to see many faith leaders being involved in the coronation service. They are citizens of our country, King Charles is their monarch. We are their neighbours.

I think that there is something offered here which is a profound view of our nation in that it is such a tapestry of ways of life that should not be ignored or even given a hierarchy of values.

The opening words of the service were very Christian and deeply moving. The first words said after the opening Psalm began with a child called Samuel Strachan addressing King Charles saying:

Our Majesty, as children of the kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of kings.

King Charles replied:

In his name and after his example I come not to be served but to serve.

Surely it is astonishing that a child should be give the opening invitation and that the King should declare himself as a servant after the pattern of Jesus.

Our faith is not about privilege and power. It is about a confident view of life and how we will make it available to others. We are not anxious and defensive as so often happens with a strong point of view. We recognise difference and seek to find common ground, solutions for disagreements, sharing of our common life and even learning from the wisdom we do not have.

In a world that has so many places of hostility if not even outright war, such a view is truly majestic. One of the titles of Jesus is the Prince of Peace. To live in a kingdom that has such a view of life and is seriously seeking to turn it into a reality is getting close to heaven on earth.

Dead Dogs

Life has its ups and down. So often there are criticisms of what is going on and despair about the future. What of our politics? We seem in a time of change. What of the church? The decline looks very serious.

C K Chesterton said 'There are times when, the Christian Faith has to all appearance, gone to the dogs. But, in each case, it was the dog that died.'

Our faith is about majesty, it is about loving the neighbour, we need people who are examples. Let us pray for King Charles and Queen Camilla. Let us pray for ourselves as citizens of the United Kingdom. But most of all let us for the Kingdom of God and for our nation and world to be the place Jesus has prepared for us.