

Faith in a time of Change

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On this day as we pass the twenty-first anniversary of the attack on the World Trade Centre, we are confronted with another world/life changing event. The death of Elizabeth II is the removal of one of the constants in my life and in the lives of many others. There was always the Queen even as all else changed. It was remarked upon that when she came to the throne Robert Menzies was our PM and Winston Churchill in Britain. Names unfamiliar to many of this current generation.

At my age, I have come to not see life as constant but as a series of significant and life-changing events. These are markers in time and looking back, we remember them. There are the personal ones - graduation, marriage, significant birthdays, birth of children – grand children etc. And the death of significant people – Parents, Siblings etc. These are the personal markers but we have community memories as well. Most people (who are older) can tell you where they were when Man walked on the moon. I remember Yuri Gagarin's space flight, the assassination of JFK, the end of the Vietnam war, the sacking of Whitlam. All are memories we share with our community. Of course, many of these are shared with images. The haunting image of the man facing the tank at Tien amin square or the running girl from Vietnam we all remember. The extensive or perhaps I should say excessive press coverage of the Queen's death draw us back into history and this can raise many issues personally, remembering what we might have wished to forget as it takes us back into points of history when our personal history runs in parallel. Or we can be caught up in Nostalgia – unrealistically remembering only the good of the past and longing for former times

It is important that we remember – but what is more important what we do with those memories. 911 should be a warning to us of the power of evil in a world that is complacent. Needless to say, as we remember Elizabeth and the history that she represents, we perhaps should contemplate who she was. She was an exemplar in living a dutiful life. She put this in words in the book she wrote "the Servant Queen and the King she Serves". Published by the Bible Society she puts her life into the context of her faith. Indeed, for me she has been God's gift to us. She was never born to be Queen, but circumstances conspired to bring her to the throne. Circumstances conspired? Or the hand of God! To quote our Queen:

"It is this simplicity of the Christmas story that makes it so universally appealing, simple happenings that formed the starting point of the life of Jesus – a man whose teachings have been handed down from generation to generation, and have been the bedrock of my faith. "His birth marked a new beginning. "As the carol says: "The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight." Christmas 2021.

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I know just how much I rely on my own faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning, I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God. Like others of you who draw inspiration from your own faith, I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel - Christmas 2002

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I hope that, like me, you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing, unselfish and sacrificial life. Countless millions of people around the world continue to celebrate his birthday at Christmas, inspired by his teaching. He makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving; more in serving than in being served. We can surely be grateful that, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, so many of us are able to draw inspiration from his life and message, and to find in him a source of strength and courage. -Christmas 2008

She was not overt in her faith seeking not to propagate the faith through words, but living the exemplary life firmly underpinned by the true understanding of the tenets of our religious belief. From this we have all benefited. Elizabeth showed us the outworking of a life of faith lived out. As we contemplate all these things, the challenge is – what would they be able to say about us. Is the way we live – words and deeds exemplary of the faith or are we selling our communities short by living a less than Christian life. The stability of the monarchy and the character of the monarch have been God’s gift to us. Elizabeth took up the challenge from God and we all have benefited.

As Archdeacon, I have the pleasure of meeting with many faith communities. The other night, I was with a group that were lamenting the aging of the congregation and the diminishing of numbers. Elizabeth wrote after the death of Phillip - “*None of us can slow the passage of time, and while we often focus on all that has changed in the intervening years, much remains unchanged, including the Gospel of Christ and his teachings.*” Faith is not denying the obstacles, but hanging onto the promises. I reminded the gathering that ‘*these are the circumstances that God has given us*’. *Are we saying he got it wrong!!*

Maybe I am a little naïve, but what could we do if we had say twelve people firmly convinced by the teachings of Christ and the power of his resurrection.

But wait isn’t that where it all began. Our challenge is like Elizabeth to take our faith and our calling seriously.

AMEN.

In times when nothing stood
But worsened, or grew strange,
There was one constant good:
She did not change.

(Philip Larkin, lines for the Queen’s Silver Jubilee, 1977)