

Real Majesty

1 Samuel 23:1-7; Revelation 1:4b-8

A story is told of Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, on a state visit to Australia. She found herself at a garden party, surrounded by a group of inquisitive Australians. Still nodding and smiling graciously as the circle around her got closer and closer, she was heard to mutter gently under her breath, "Please don't touch the exhibits."

The Queen, the most well-travelled monarch in British History is firmly of the belief that as long as she is able, she still intends to get out and about, which is quite astonishing given that she is in her 93rd year. She has said quite clearly, "I have to be seen to be believed."

Whatever your views on monarchy might be, the United Kingdom has, with few exceptions, done relatively well with its Heads of State. Other countries perhaps less so.

Our Old Testament reading from Samuel this morning book ends last week's reading. Last week, at the beginning of the Samuel writing, we heard the mournful song of Hannah, her poignant prayer for a son, which was granted, and a future given to look forward towards. Here, at the close of the Samuel writing, we have King David's prayerful reflection on his reign as king had been like. What had real majesty been like for him?

"Last words have a special weight that other words do no. Last words are given particular significance simply because they are last words. Think of the last words that are spoken at the graveside, or the last words that are said to a child when dropping her off at university..." Or the last words said today in gratitude to the Guild who have been a part of our congregation for many years, and whose ministry and witness will be marked by the dedication of stained glass in our vestibule at the close of the service.

The Bible is full of partings, and parting words matter. They're not always profound, but often they are. David, looking back on his long life, has cause to think on his successes, and his failures; the highpoints of his kingship, and the low points of his humanity. At last, and it was a

flickering understanding throughout his life, but at last, David in this last psalm points to the foundational importance of knowing the source of whatever strength he had. It was God.

David saw his kingship as a gift from God. Not something to be held with a clenched fist, but something to be held gently. David saw over the long years of his life that when things had gone badly for him, he had relied on his own strength and made his own decisions without reference to anyone, let alone God. But when things had gone well with him, it was at those times he had remembered that he was with God.

Real majesty, recognising the inner quality that is within each human being, is not based on whether or not someone has been anointed, and crowned; but whether or not they remember and live up to the royal blessing that has been placed on each one of us. People of faith are part of a royal family, with duties, obligations, tasks and work to do. With standards to live up to, and with realisation that from time to time, all of us, every single one of us, will stumble, slip and let the side down. When it comes to your last words and thoughts, will you be able, like David, to look back honestly at your years, whether they be long or short, and see those times when you were distant from, for close to God?

A good king, a good person, bases life upon the justice and the mercy and the kindness of God. Real majesty, in every single one of us, allows us to look at what is weak and what is strong in our lives, and save us from ourselves because the corrective of God's example, supremely in Jesus, is there for us to follow.

For David, God did not determine everything that happened in his life, but God urged David in the best possible direction. When our human intention and action cooperates with that goad towards divine justice and love, then God's Spirit will shine most clearly in us and through us. God promised to work with David, to stay close to him as he made his way in the world. In that proximity of relationship is the potential for every single one of us to be made holy in our purpose and to achieve our best potential. It is when we, in our own way, and by how we choose to live our lives, might also achieve real majesty.

The wisdom of David in the twilight of his kingship is that he knows the source of his power and he knows the character of God's justice, and it was these that made David, at his best, the king he was. As David prepared to depart, he reminds us again of the promises of God, Who is always with us.

That is, after all, what the word 'good-bye' means. God be with you. The God to whom each one of us belongs, whose we are and whom we serve.

This is often seen as the last Sunday of the Church year. The Sunday before we step into Advent and the preparation to celebrate the coming of the Christ-child to be with us. There we celebrate a different kind of majesty. In Jesus we see a different kind of kingship. The manger child; the Nazareth nobody, the washer of feet, the flesh-and-blood life susceptible to lashes, thorns and nails. But real majesty it is. The beginning of and the completion of majesty.

On this Christ the King Sunday, the lordship of God and Jesus is placed front and centre. When earthly kings come and go; when human frailty is something we all advance towards; when organisations and institutions rise and fall; the promise of the One Who is the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega, is offered to us.

All things change, nothing lasts forever, but faith tells us that at its heart, the promise of new birth remains. Which is why I told the children about the Guild stained glass, and hope that they might, in their time, respond to that same calling. Which is why I hoped you might be eavesdropping during the children's talk, because this God Who is near, this God Who continues to come to be close us, has not finished with us yet.

The majesty of God in heaven comes down to touch the earth. Divinity suffuses humanity. Echoing God's first appearance to Moses in the Burning Bush, and the words Jesus would use when He described Himself in different ways, Revelation uses the "I am" language. "I am the beginning and the ending." The parallel lines of heaven and earth eventually meet. What has been merely common-place becomes truly majestic.

On this last day of the Christian year, whatever the joys or the sorrows, the disasters or the triumphs, the children of faith are called to look up, and see that God draw near, again. To

realise that He has never been far away. To believe that however much we have drifted and doubted, now is a time to come close to God and to be the best that we are enabled to be.

Times may be hard, life may be tough, the future may be uncertain. But look up. Look up! God's real majesty is near!

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit

Amen