

‘The Glory of Humble Service’

A sermon preached by the Reverend Canon Carl Turner

Rector of Saint Thomas Church

at Her Majesty’s Chapel Royal, St. James’s Palace, London

at a special Evensong to commemorate the Platinum Jubilee

Sunday, June 5, 2022 at 3 p.m.

• Exodus 33:7-20 • 2 Corinthians 3:4-end •

Writing an op-ed in the Washington Post on Thursday, Michael Gerson, commented on the love and respect shown to Her Majesty the Queen by many Americans: *“As Queen Elizabeth II’s Platinum Jubilee proceeds – and the only British monarch most of us have ever known takes and unaccustomed bow, and corgis everywhere bask in the reflected glory of the divine right of kings – it is perhaps worth asking why Americans should care for such antiquated pageantry.”*

The celebrations of this four-day holiday allow more than just the corgis of the world to rejoice, and those of us who find ourselves living in the former colonies have a deep sense of pride and patriotism. ‘Land of hope and glory’... ‘Happy and glorious, long to reign over us’ ...Even the weather has been glorious! As we read the history of Great Britain and the Commonwealth of Nations, that word ‘glory’ appears many times, even on our war memorials honoring ‘Our Glorious Dead.’

And yet, in English, the word glory does little to convey the depth and complexity of God’s glory. In the Bible, there are *several* words that can be translated *glory*. In Hebrew, it can derive from the word for ‘heavy’ – God’s glory is immense and fills the universe. Another Hebrew word is derived from the word for ‘luminous’ or ‘radiant’ – God’s glory is bright and fills the darkness of our lives. God’s glory was also manifested in saving acts such as the Exodus from Egypt. His glory was also revealed in very particular ways - the burning bush; the pillar of cloud by day; the pillar of fire by night; the cloud covering Mount Sinai, or the Tent of Meeting which we heard of in our first lesson this afternoon. At that Tent of Meeting, Moses asked to see God’s glory because that same glory characterized the relationship of God with the twelve tribes; *“consider that this nation is thy people,”* he said.

In our second lesson today, Paul speaks of the glory of God revealed to Moses that made his face to shine, but one which was only a temporary experience, and that faded over time. Moses had a close relationship with God, our first reading said that they spoke as friends would speak, but Moses could not see God face to face and live. In Jesus Christ, however, we see God face to face

and receive the promise of eternal life: “*And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*” (John 1:14) and as Paul describes Jesus, ‘*the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*’ (2 Corinthians 4:4b)

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, Jesus prayed that the glory that he shared with the Father would also be shared with all who followed him; “*the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:*” (John 17:22)

Archbishop Michael Ramsey thus suggested that, “*The concept of glory illuminates every part of the Christian faith.*”¹

But God’s glory is not like human glory. When asked about greatness by his disciples, the Lord Jesus took a little child and placed the child in their midst by way of example; in the Upper Room, he took off his outer robe and assumed the position of a slave and washed his disciples’ feet; and most significantly, he said to his disciples, “*whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all.*” (Mark 10:44) To those to whom is entrusted the gift of leadership, Jesus calls them to a life of humble service. The Platinum Jubilee is a celebration of such a life of service.

In the Queen’s Christmas message of 2016, Her Majesty spoke of the success of British and Commonwealth Olympic medalists in the Olympic and Paralympic Games that year and how their inspiration would become other people’s aspiration. And, as we would expect, The Queen also saw inspiration in less dramatic areas of service and dedication. She said, “*To be inspirational, you don’t have to save lives or win medals. I often draw strength from meeting ordinary people doing extraordinary things – volunteers, carers, community organizers and good neighbors – unsung heroes whose quiet dedication makes them special.*”

Inspiration fed their aspiration.

That is why the most solemn moment of the Coronation of the sovereign is *not* as most of my American friends would have it, the placing of the Crown of St. Edward on the monarch’s head. Rather, it is the quiet moment, hidden from public view, when the sovereign is anointed with Holy Oil – the oil that the church has used since the earliest of days to signify the anointing of the Holy Spirit. To be inspired, is to quite literally to take a deep breath; on the day of Resurrection, John’s Gospel tells us that when Jesus appeared to his disciples, he *breathed on them and said “receive the Holy Spirit.”* (see John 20:19-23). Although Americans love Handel’s anthem ‘Zadok the Priest,’ most do not remember that the hymn, sung by the choir as The Queen took off her crimson robe to prepare for the anointing, was, significantly, *Veni Creator Spiritus – Come Holy Ghost* our souls inspire. How wonderful that this Platinum Jubilee Celebration culminates with the Day of

Pentecost – Whitsunday – when we think of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on God’s people and on our Queen. It is that inspiration that has fed our Queen’s aspiration ever since, or as the Queen herself said in February this year, *“It gives me pleasure to renew to you the pledge I gave in 1947 that my life will always be devoted to your service.”*

The vocation of our Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth is marked by a life of service rather than status. As she held the sceptre at the moment of coronation, the Queen also held the Sceptre with the Dove – also known as the Rod of Equity and Mercy – a reminder of the pastoral care that Her Majesty has for her people, and the rule of law which governs our common life as a nation.

Sharing in God’s glory demands responsibility and a life of service and self-offering; of making the right choices. As Michael Ramsey also said *“The glorification of Christians is no pious mysticism...It is a matter of conflict and struggle in human flesh and blood.”*² Whoever said being Head of State was easy? For 70 years, our beloved Queen has set before us an example of unfailing devotion to that kind of service, inspiring us to make the right choices. She has faithfully put into practice the promise she made 75 years ago, continuing to be inspired by the Holy Spirit who has strengthened her through difficult times and well as good. Today, we pray that the Holy Spirit may continue to inspire her and us to be bright lights in a dark world, where so many people have such a shallow understanding of what true glory is, and where some world leaders, celebrities, and the rich show so little regard for the vocation to serve, choosing instead to dominate, oppress, or take by force what their office or privilege demands that they protect with love. Unlike them, we know that glory comes through self-sacrifice and is glimpsed in the service of Jesus Christ to all people, whose crown was a crown of thorns, and whose throne was a cross. With that image before us we can live hopeful lives, humble lives, whether we live in a palace or a small apartment in New York, and attempt to live lives characterized by service done in Christ’s name. Then, when our work is finally done, and it is time to meet our maker, perhaps the words of Charles Wesley, will finally ring true:

“Finish then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be; let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee: changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place, till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love and praise.”

May God bless our Sovereign Lady Queen Elizabeth and all the Royal Family, our Nation, and the Commonwealth of Nations that she has inspired for 70 years.

¹ Michael Ramsey: The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ p.83

² Michael Ramsey: The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ p.54