

Bishop of Chichester's Platinum Jubilee Sermon at Chichester Cathedral on June 4th 2022

I am glad to say that Chichester was essentially royalist, opposed to Cromwell in the Civil War. So today we are proud to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee as we look to the future, while giving thanks for the achievements of the past 70 years. And three hundred and sixty-two years ago, we were also celebrating an unprecedented royal event in the restoration of the Monarchy.

In his famous diary, Samuel Pepys records the moment at Dover on 25 May 1660 when the King returned to British soil. The Mayor of Dover presented him with "a very rich Bible," says Pepys, "which [the King] took and said it was the thing that he loved above all things in the world."

Pepys notes that the King then got in a coach and went straight to Canterbury, which perhaps suggests that Dover hasn't changed much from that day to this.

Later that year a new edition of the Authorised, King James Version of the Bible would be printed for use in Divine Service in the Church of England. Its title page depicted the newly restored Monarch as King Solomon, enthroned and attended by the tribes of Israel and other Old Testament figures, such as Moses and Aaron who represent Church and State, Zadok the Priest and Nathan the Prophet, made famous by Handel's coronation anthem, and King David with his harp.

In 1660 the subtext of this title page was the assertion of God's blessing on the Monarch and the nation after a time of war, social upheaval and dynastic uncertainty, the like of which we had never known.

Seventy years ago this nation was again in a state of recovery from trauma as we faced the destruction and debts left to us by the Second World War. A painful abdication had similarly confronted us with dynastic uncertainty, from which we were spectacularly rescued by the reassuring, but all too short, reign of King George VI.

At her Coronation in Westminster Abbey our present Sovereign was also presented with the Bible. It had been carried in procession, solemnly laid on the high altar and brought to her for the Coronation Oath. After that she kissed the Bible, signed the Oath, and the Bible was then acclaimed as "the most valuable thing that this world affords."

The Coronation Oath included an undertaking to preserve the “doctrine, worship, discipline and government” of the Church of England as by law established. It is an oath that puts into words what the title page of the 1660 edition of the Bible was seeking to represent.

First, ours is a Church that inhabits sacred space in buildings sanctified for worship, with the architectural design of the title page of our Bible reminding us that the throne on which the godly Monarch sits, the *cathedra* or throne of the bishop, and the stall of the local incumbent in every parish church are all seats from which we oversee the discipline and government of Church of England and the mission God has entrusted to us in these consecrated buildings.

Second, Zadok and Aaron remind us that we are an ordered Church that has retained bishop, priest and deacon for the teaching of doctrine – the faith we have received and which bring to life in divine worship, as that faith is proclaimed afresh through word and sacrament in each generation.

Third, the figure of David as the author of the Psalms speaks to us about the seasons and festivals of the Church, the sanctification of time through a yearly cycle of liturgical worship, and a reminder of the account each of us shall give to God for how we shaped the time and society in which we live according to the virtues of justice and peace.

The Queen has been unafraid, especially in her Christmas Messages, to articulate her commitment to this inheritance of Christian faith. That commitment has gone hand in hand with a vision of tolerance and hope for the whole human race.

This global perspective and its challenges is constantly informed by her unwavering commitment to the Commonwealth as a network of relationships that can make the world a better place. And as we prepare for the international gathering of Anglican bishops at the Lambeth Conference this year, we would do well to recall the Queen’s assessment of the Church of England’s responsibility for defending the practice of faith as intrinsic to human dignity. In a speech she made during her Diamond Jubilee in 2012, she said,

“The concept of our established Church is occasionally misunderstood and, I believe, commonly under-appreciated. Its role is not to defend Anglicanism to the exclusion of other religions. Instead, the Church has a duty to protect the free practice of all faiths in this country...Indeed, religious groups have a proud track record of helping those in the greatest need...They remind us of the responsibilities we have beyond ourselves.”

The care of others is a fundamental duty for Christians, as for all people of faith and goodwill. It's what motivates the urgency with which we must address our damage to the environment, just as it must inform our response to migration on a massive scale, and to poverty, at home and globally.

The Queen has always laid before us a pragmatic and attainable response, in the cumulative effect of individual acts of kindness, in the love and quality of life in our homes and families, and in the loyalty of our friendships. When she spoke to the nation about these things during the Covid pandemic, her final words to those who had lost loved ones echoed a wartime song: "We will meet again," she said.

It was an affirmation that we can survive the trials we face, as we have done before. It was an affirmation of the fundamental importance of friendship and family life. But it was also an echo of the gospel of Jesus Christ who said to his friends, "I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take that joy from you."

As we celebrate the achievements of our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth, let us give thanks for all that she has done to fulfil the commitment she made at her Coronation, encouraging us to be our better selves on earth, in the certain hope that life and love will be brought to perfection in the glory of heaven. God save the Queen. Amen.