

SERMON, JUBILEE CHORAL EVENSONG – PROV 8, LUKE 22

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lovely story in the Church Times this week. The previous Bishop of Norwich asked Her Majesty how she had got on with one of the new bishops, who had made his first appearance in the pulpit at Sandringham. “Nice young man,” she replied, “he preached a good sermon, then he preached another one”. Her Majesty is well known for liking short sermons – so I have listened.

I remember the Silver Jubilee, and a packed parish church in Barton, just outside Cambridge. I remember Mr Law, the elderly Vicar (probably younger than I am now) and Mr Frampton, the Baptist minister, leading the service together. I remember the Golden Jubilee, 800 people in a packed St Edmundsbury Cathedral, the Diamond Jubilee with a full St Mary’s Ponteland. We have not managed packed churches this year.

I remember the Barton village party, the huge bonfire (no barriers in sight), and it seemed like everyone was there. This year the Red Cow in Allestree was commenting how few people had turned up – and I don’t think it’s just us. The way people come together has changed, I’ve shared Jubilee photos with more people on facebook than we’ve shared the real thing with those who have come into our churches – it’s frustrating because social media is not a decent substitute for the real thing.

The present is rather frightening – another food bank Sunday, more people needing to be fed. In a few days time, they’ll try and fly the first plane load of people to Rwanda – we have a labour shortage in this country, jobs we cannot fill, so why aren’t we welcoming the immigrant and using their skills and their willingness to work? Surely that is cheaper and easier than dumping them half way across the world? We’re planning for a Green Afternoon in a fortnight’s time as our planet is literally on fire, being destroyed – and yet it’s fine for the rich to fly round this world in their private jets - if you need to get from California to London for a Jubilee service might I suggest you catch a scheduled plane, if you need to get from Balmoral, Ma’am, use your train.

The future is somewhat frightening. Our relationship with Europe is a mess, and that’s me being polite. Our relationship with the Commonwealth, indeed the Commonwealth itself, may well change out of all recognition over the next decade. Some commentators are saying we might see the break up of the United Kingdom over the next decade – and if you had told us in 1977 at the Silver Jubilee that by the Platinum Jubilee, Sinn Fein would be the majority political party in Northern Ireland local government, we would never have believed you.

So, how do we respond? Let's turn the clock back, back to the days of Empire and Great Britain, of crowns on pint glasses, etc etc. That might make some people happy, but you can't do it. The world has changed, life moves on. The current Bishop of Norwich tweeted that the correct response to all the nonsense about going back to imperial measurements is, and I quote, "perhaps churches could bring back biblical lengths – fingers, handbreaths, spans, cubits, rods, fathoms and Sabbath's day journeys. And biblical weights, gerah, beka, shekel, mina, talent. What about a bath (32.9 litres) of wine? Think of the fun we could have", he says. The managing director of Asda says that the policy will simply increase the price of food – and with so many of our country struggling to make ends meet, well then it stops being funny.

We respond with Christian faith. Firstly, that God made this world, and God loves us. Despite all the sin, all the failings, so much that is wrong – God loves us. The rainbow is a biblical sign, it was a pandemic sign – the love of God which surrounds us all, nothing can separate us from the love of God. As Christians we believe that Christ went to the cross and died for the sins of the world – ultimately, evil is defeated. We believe that faith is important. To quote Her Majesty, "To many of us our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example." Faith is a comfort, and we know that however much the world changes, however much our country changes, however much the church changes, our faith is in Christ – and his love is unchanging. A comfort, but also a challenge – as God uses us to build a better world.

Alison read to us about Wisdom – and, as I always say, wisdom in the bible is female. Us married men would never argue! Peter read to us about service – the last seventy years have seen an amazing, wise woman on the throne, a woman who has given her life to the service of God and her people. There will always be wisdom, there will always be service, there will always be love – and we commit ourselves to being people of wisdom, service and love, in our churches, our communities, and the world around us. Amen.

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