

# Her Late Majesty The Queen

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*A sermon given on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2022 – by the Vicar the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster, to Commemorate Her Late Majesty the Queen*

*2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:4; John 6:35-40*

Over the last 70 years, we've got used to singing the national anthem, 'God Save the Queen'. But it's not just an anthem, it's also a prayer: 'God save our gracious Queen; long live our noble Queen; God save the Queen; send her victorious, happy and glorious; long to reign over us; God save the Queen.' And in many respects, it's clear that that prayer has been answered. Our Queen did indeed live a long life, 96 years, and she did indeed have a long reign over us, longer than any other British monarch. So in that very literal sense, God did save the Queen through all kinds of personal and national ups and downs. But now that she has gone, it doesn't feel as though our prayer has been answered. It feels almost like the opposite, as though we've been terribly deprived, almost unfairly made bereft. Of course, we knew she couldn't live forever, but somehow, irrationally, we just assumed she would. And when we sang 'God Save the Queen', did we really think she would just go on forever? Is that what we were praying for?

In our first reading this morning, St. Paul offers a way of thinking about this by suggesting that we have both an inner and an outer nature. Our outer nature, he calls an 'earthly tent', which is mortal, limited, temporary and subject to decay. Our inner nature by contrast, St Paul suggests, is constantly being renewed and is like a heavenly house made by God for life and for eternity. And I think this matches our experience. I've met a number of older people who have said to me things like, "I may be 80 on the outside, but inside I'm still 18. And when we get to an age where not only does our hair turn grey, but our energy starts to fail and our bodies begin to fall apart, we also discover to our amazement and delight, that we are still learning new things, still discovering fresh delights in the world, still adding to our rich storehouse of experience and memory. On the outside, we may be fading away, but on the inside we are growing wiser and richer and more full of life. Isn't that a sign that we are made for eternity?"

The Victorian children's writer George MacDonald wrote a story called *The Princess and the Goblin*, in which the hero had a supernatural gift. His special gift meant that

when he shook hands with another person, he could tell what kind of creature they were turning into. So when he shook hands with a dishonest and slippery shopkeeper, what he felt was the tail of a snake. But when he shook hands with a coarse and loud washer woman who had shown him kindness, what he felt was the immaculate, soft hand of a princess. And I think it's often true that as we get older, our true inner nature starts to become more obvious to those around us.

And I think this was also true of the Queen. She had always had a strong sense of duty and of service. She always had a strong sense of vocation, of her life not being simply her own possession to do with as she pleased. But as she got older, it became clearer that her sense of vocation and costly service was actually growing stronger and was being renewed. But it wasn't just the result of her natural temperament or upbringing: in the language of St Paul, the Queen's inner nature was being renewed; was being prepared for an '*eternal weight of glory*'; was getting ready to be clothed with a heavenly dwelling. And in her Christmas broadcasts and on other occasions, the Queen spoke increasingly openly about her faith in Jesus Christ, about the inspiration she drew from his example, the sense of peace she got from her faith in times of difficulty, and the importance of the Christian message of reconciliation in a divided world. This wasn't a formal outward faith, but something living and life-giving that came from deep within. It helped to create that sense the Queen always gave of representing something bigger, something reliable and permanent, something that could ride above the changing forces of history.

We don't mourn the Queen simply for the loss of her own personal qualities, real and remarkable though they were. We mourn the Queen because she represented something timeless and eternal; something stable and unchanging; something that came not from her own nature, but from her sense of being answerable to God. At a national and in a symbolic way, she was a point of contact with a sense of transcendence; something reliable, because ultimately it didn't come from this world.

And St Paul suggests that our present affliction is preparing us for an *eternal 'weight of glory'* beyond all measure for each one of us, because we look not at what can be seen, but at what cannot be seen. For he says, "*What can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.*" So there's an invitation there to reflect upon our own lives and natures; to judge one another, not by what is visible on the surface, but by the unseen glory being nourished and prepared on the inside.

I wonder, what kind of creature are you turning into? What is the '*weight of glory*' awaiting you?

When we sang 'God Save the Queen', we surely weren't just praying for the Queen's long life and long reign. We were also praying for salvation, in the fullest sense, that the Queen's earthly tent might be transformed into a heavenly dwelling full of life. So far as it is in our power to judge, that prayer has also been answered.

So when at the end of this service, we sing 'God save the King', may it be a prayer not only for King Charles as he takes up his new responsibilities, but may it be a prayer for each one of us that we may receive grace to prepare ourselves for an '*eternal weight of glory*' beyond all measure.

## Reading Text

2 Corinthians 4:16 – 5:4

*So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.*

*For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling— if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.*

John 6:35-40

*Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.'*