

2023-05-07 ... 10.00am Civic Service ... The Venerable Paul Thomas

**Sermon for Coronation of King Charles III:**

Today we celebrate the beginning of the reign of king Charles III. His coronation has brought out the best in the pageant and ceremony of the British people. Perfectly timed processions, beautifully adorned parades, long lines of immaculately uniformed soldiers have all passed through the streets of London. Crowds of onlookers and enthusiasts have gathered in their thousands with flags and colourful bunting; heads of state from around the world have appeared to mark the event and the Church of England has once again hosted the Coronation in Westminster Abbey. Aided by other faith leaders the Church has sung praises, offered prayers and then in a solemn moment anointed and crowned the new monarch, pronouncing God's blessing upon him and his future reign. All of this has brought a widespread sense of unity and joy to our nation and it has affirmed how highly esteemed the royal family remain in the hearts of a great many people. Our Old Testament reading this morning goes back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC when a young man called Solomon had just been made king of Israel. Solomon has a dream in which God speaks to him in these words: **'Ask for whatever you want Me to give you'**. God gives the young king a carte blanche and how he responds to that invitation will of course reveal his true character. Will he blurt out a list of selfish desires or will he consider the welfare of the people he is about to govern?

As Charles faces exactly the same moment in his life, these words which Solomon spoke are poignant and I think reveal 3 insights, important to a new king.

The first of these is his **HUMANITY**. Solomon knows that he possesses all the fragility and limitation of being human. He is no superman, but rather a needy individual. Listen to what he says: **'I am only a little child and I don't know how to carry out my duties.'**

Solomon knew that he did not have all the skills and wisdom and competence he needed to fulfil the role of king. He was human.

And so is Charles. At the age of 74 he has been through a great many 'up's' and 'downs' in his life. There has been, at times, deep turmoil in his personal relationships and specially during what the late Queen called the 'annus horribilis'. Indeed, even now he has a number of difficulties in his family circle. So Charles, like Solomon is fully aware of his fragility and his failings, of his limited ability to fulfil the role assigned to him as King.

But, for those who profess a belief in a God of love – as Charles does – there is the possibility of seeking mercy, help and guidance.

As Christians look towards God they have in their sights the Risen Christ not just as an exalted heavenly figure but also as the One who still bears in his risen body the marks of crucifixion – the wounds in hands and feet and side. He shows us God as a Being who knows the pain and perplexity of the human condition and who brings to it the promise and possibility of deliverance.

So Charles knelt in Westminster Abbey yesterday to ask for God to look favourably upon him – and we who share his faith can likewise seek God's favour both for our king. **PTO**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> insight we gain from Solomon's response to God concerns his **HUMILITY**. Solomon's short prayer contains 3 references to himself as 'servant' He also prays for what some Bibles' call 'an understanding mind'. But the Hebrew is much more suggestive and literally says 'a listening heart'.

When people are arrogant and full of themselves they are so busy boasting about their lives that they don't have time to listen to others. Noel Coward once met an old friend and his opening remark was: 'There won't be time to talk about you and me, so let's just talk about me.' When people are like that they never take any notice of others; they never pick up the nugget of wisdom whispered in some casual conversation and they never remain open to new ideas from the people they meet. But Solomon shuns that approach. He wants to be sensitive to all comers and to be alert to perspectives other than his own so that he can be in step with people across the country.

I think Charles has for many years demonstrated that same willingness to listen. His demeanour is humble. He approaches people gently and his quiet smile invites people to talk with him and share their concerns. Charles has spent many hours consulting with groups of people who struggle to gain a hearing or receive recognition of their needs.

In the search for humility, the supreme example and inspiration is Jesus Christ. '**Though he was equal to God**' writes St Paul, '**he humbled himself and took on our human condition.**' That decision to share our human nature led, says St Paul, to his death on the Cross. In that death he absorbed all that is negative and destructive and dark in human life – and transformed it by the power of his unquenchable love for all people a love that would not give up on them.

Likewise humble leadership can take the dark side of life and infuse light into it. think of the Queen going to Aberfan or giving her speech during Covid; Charles visiting Grenfell Tower or Brixton after the riots. People drew strength and resolve from their unassuming presence. In what many have called His 'me' generation let's pray that Charles may go on showing what a difference humility can make and try to do the same ourselves.

The third insight that Solomon's response to God gives us is **HOPE**. To see this clearly we would need to read further into 1 Kings 3 and hear God's pleasure in Solomon's response and His promise to bring prosperity to the nation.

The Book of Proverbs which has been attributed to King Solomon contains an important sentence: '**Where there is no vision, the people perish.**' Solomon had a vision and he fulfilled it by building a Temple in Jerusalem and making it a prominent city. He also made Israel a great trading nation, so that there were many signs of prosperity and plenty among the people.

Charles is likewise someone who has patiently and persistently shown that he has vision. He has long espoused the climate change agenda and the need for organic food production. He has often lamented our recent architectural developments wanting the built environment to be not just utilitarian but also aesthetically beautiful. He has created many schemes to help young people find a worthwhile career and it is reckoned that through the Princes' Trust he has given a new future to a million of them. He has often been an advocate of faith communities other than the Christian one and wanted people of all ethnic backgrounds to win proper recognition in British society. 'I worry for my children and my grandchildren' he said recently 'and what kind of world we are passing on to them'.  
**(see next page)**

Hope is one of the central of Christianity. Jesus was a man full of promise and hope. He emphasized the power of forgiveness to free people from the burden of the past. He encouraged the possibility of working together to build a new future. And Jesus embodied the ultimate hope of resurrection where God's love transcends death and opens up on the reality of eternal life for all. We should be thankful that Charles has caught that vision of hope and that in all his activities he shows a spirit of positivity and a desire to transcend present difficulties.

So I welcome the beginning of the reign of Charles III. It is undergirded by the three virtues that Solomon saw as vital in the exercise of kingship: humanity, humility and hope. But as I finish let me say that it is not just Kings but Commoners who can learn from this Old Testament passage.

You and I know that through out own humanity we have woven a story that is both good and bad. And for us there is with God mercy and the promise of forgiveness, restoration and guidance.

You and I know that we have not always valued humility and all too often excluded others with our selfish preoccupations.

But with God there is the invitation to take up our cross, deny self-importance, and be open to the riches of other people and other perspectives.

Finally, you and I know that all too often we have lost hope. Hope for a better future, hope for an eternal future. But with God we see it is possible. Our hope is in God who can-and will – to transcend all difficulties – (including death) as His love comes to reign supreme over all things and all people.

In Charles III a man of real depth, dedication, and devotion has begun to reign over our country and Commonwealth and I sincerely hope that we will be able to support him with our prayers and our goodwill so that the better world he desires and dreams of may become a greater reality.

God save the King!

Amen