



Trinity Sunday
Sunday 3 June 2012

On the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II

A sermon by Revd David Jackson

Readings: Revelation 21.1-7; Romans 12.1-13

“Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves - from our recklessness or our greed.

God sent into the world a unique person - neither a philosopher nor a general, important though they are, but a Saviour, with the power to forgive.”

These words were spoken last Christmas, not by an archbishop or bishop, not even by one of the more erudite and wise clergy in this place but by HM the Queen in her Christmas broadcast. It is a profound reflection on the meaning of Christmas and of what it means to be human.

The Queen went on:

“Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.”

I am not a natural monarchist. Indeed instinctively, intellectually and theologically I am a republican, so I come to this celebration without rose tinted spectacles or sentimental flummery, though I hope I shall not languish for too long in the Tower of London for saying that in this Royal Parish Church. However in reality and in practice I find much to celebrate and learn from the Queen's faithful service to this country and commonwealth. By birth, and then by accident of history, she found herself called to be Queen, the first woman to hold that office since Victoria.

Tonight we gather to celebrate a Jubilee. Jubilee has roots in Egyptian culture and is recognized in the writings of the Old Testament and in Christian practice from the earliest days to be a time of liberation from slavery, freedom from debt and from sin...for the Queen to talk of forgiveness is bang on the button for a year of Jubilee.

But this is not just any Jubilee...it is the celebration of a remarkable 60 years of faithful service by a remarkable woman. Strip away for a moment all the pomp and ceremony, the marching bands, the river pageant, Katherine Jenkins singing the National Anthem at Epsom and the fly pasts...splendid and stirring though they are, and you are left with a rather diminutive, yet remarkable human being. Called to serve at the tender age of 25... her secretary says that when she heard the news of her father's death “she embraced her destiny with both hands.”

In Westminster Abbey she was anointed with oil and had hands laid on her just as if she were being ordained a priest. She was consecrated for service. In her discipleship she has, like all human beings, been through happy and sad times, through difficulties which were at times of her own making, just like the difficulties we all get into, as well as difficulties which arise simply because of circumstance. That is what it is to be human, that is what it is to be a disciple and that is what it is to stand in the need of God's forgiveness and to accept it.

One of the most powerful moments of the coronation service is when the Queen is handed the Holy Bible with these words:

‘Our gracious Queen: to keep your Majesty ever mindful of the law and the Gospel of God as the Rule for the whole life and government of Christian Princes, we present you with this Book, the

most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; This is the royal Law; These are the lively Oracles of God.'

These are the lively oracles of God...what a wonderful way of thinking about the scriptures – the lively oracles of God; and so we turn to tonight's readings. In Revelation we hear about the new creation which God promises...a new heaven and earth where God will wipe every tear from our eyes. A place 'Where Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away'.

A wonderful vision of heaven...but of course this is only as a result of making all things new, and so once again we come back to forgiveness, for without forgiveness we are stuck...paralysed by our own sense of guilt and unworthiness. Let me remind you once more of what the Queen said last Christmas: "it is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God".

In tonight's reading from Romans we also hear of new beginnings. 'Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect'.

What God offers is that forgiveness of Jubilee, but he offers it not just every 25 or 50 or 60 years, he offers it every second - of every minute - of every hour - of every day - of every year. The cancelling of debt and sin...it is a liberating experience to feel God's love in this way...accepting God's forgiveness and healing frees us up, it liberates us...but it also begs the question: for what are we liberated?

We may find some answers as we reflect on the life of the Queen; her example of service: steadfastness, faithfulness and loyalty; her willingness to keep on keeping on however hard the going gets. These are not always seen as sexy or wildly exciting qualities but they are qualities which exemplify the steadfastness and loyalty of the God who loves us unconditionally and for all eternity.

Finally the Queen is also a woman who has gone out into the world - both in the United Kingdom and into the wider commonwealth and beyond; and simply by her presence has taken her love of God with her.

She has been a blessing to many people and that is a vocation to which all of us are called.

In this year of Jubilee –let us keep our own time of Jubilee - a time to remember the gift of God's forgiveness, the cancelling of debt. A time for new beginnings for this is our vocation as much as it is the Queen's. A call to service in the world, each of us according to the gifts with which we have been blessed, called ourselves to be a Blessing to the world.

Each one of us is called to celebrate Jubilee; to seek out and receive God's forgiving love and to use the freedom which this gives us to serve the world in our relationships, in our work and in all those places and with those people where we live our lives; and in our care for the wider world.

There is a church I know where over the door there is a large sign which reads: 'You are now entering a sacred space'...you are now entering a sacred space.

I think perhaps we should have one over the door of this church, especially when it gets too noisy or busy in here, or when people come in whom we would rather stayed away – ...but then in this church I suggest we have the sign so that you see it not on the way in but on the way out - for it is as we leave that we enter a truly sacred space....it is in that sacred space outside this building that all of us are called to be a blessing in the world. Amen.