

(Isaiah 6:1-8; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; Luke 5:1-11)

So, it was 70 years ago today that Princess Elizabeth became Queen Elizabeth the Second. Our celebrations of her platinum jubilee will be delayed until June in order to give some distance from the reality that this day is also the anniversary of her father King George VI's death. He was just 56.

Queen Elizabeth's 70 years of dedicated, unstinting public service show that in her own special way she has truly emulated Simon Peter, James and John – who 'left everything and followed Jesus'.

Since she became Queen she has worked alongside 14 Prime Ministers (so far!), and 7 Archbishops of Canterbury. As our head of state and as both Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England, Queen Elizabeth has proved over the years to be a wise servant-leader.

It was on her 21st birthday, almost 5 years before her accession to the throne, that Princess Elizabeth had said this:

'I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service... But I shall not have strength to carry out this resolution alone unless you join in it with me, as I now invite you to do... God help me to make good my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it.'

After her accession, and as she prepared for her coronation, she said in her first Christmas broadcast:

'Pray for me ... that God may give me wisdom and strength to carry out the solemn promises I shall be making, and that I may faithfully serve him and you, all the days of my life.'

Clearly, even in her twenties – let alone at 95 – we see the wisdom of Solomon!

As we think today of Queen Elizabeth's enduring example of self-giving service, founded as it is upon a living Christian faith, we recognise that we are all called to follow Jesus; each of us in our own way. After all, it is a *personal* call that we receive. In our first reading we heard how the prophet Isaiah received his call, leading to his oft-quoted response of humble obedience: 'Here am I, send me'. Similarly, St Paul's call – which was dramatic as well as personal! – gave him the freedom his soul had been seeking for so long: to use his gifts to God's glory. 'By the grace of God I am what I am', he said.

All this reminds us that even if we feel unworthy of God's call we can be assured that the call itself makes us worthy. And because it is a personal call God is simply inviting us to enter more fully into relationship with him, and thereby to become more fully ourselves. As Isaiah, St Paul, and Queen Elizabeth would all testify, we can always trust God because he knows us better than we know ourselves and because he loves us more than we can know.

So regardless of whether you are in your twenties or your nineties – or anywhere in-between – if you are seeking afresh to discern what God is calling you to do or to be, start by asking yourself the question, What is it that I would love to do? And then do it with all the love of your heart! Whatever our age or stage in life, God never stops calling us ever onward, ever God-ward.

Someone else for whom today will always be an important anniversary is Ezra Akmet, who will be baptised in our 12 o'clock Baptism Service. His names have been carefully chosen by his parents, and these are the very names by which God will call him personally and progressively to fullness of life.

Ezra, a good, solid Old Testament name, is derived from the Hebrew meaning 'God helps and protects'. Akmet has Islamic roots, reflecting the diverse origins of the family, and denotes one who constantly thanks God. As Ezra's mum Jale observed, 'names have power'!

Now something I always delight in doing at a baptism service is anointing the candidates. I tell the parents that this is just like in Old Testament times when kings were anointed, denoting the bestowal upon them of God's wisdom and God's grace; of God's Holy Spirit. For example, when King David was anointed by the prophet Samuel, we are told, 'from that day the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power'. Handel took the drama of the moment of anointing to new heights with his composition 'Zadok the Priest'. It was Zadok along with Nathan the prophet who anointed David's son Solomon as king in his stead.

Indeed, 'Zadok the Priest' was sung as Elizabeth was being anointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher. And the anointing is the most sacred moment of a coronation ceremony. Wearing no symbols of royal status but only a simple white dress Elizabeth was shielded from the cameras by a canopy. As the Archbishop anointed her, prayers were said over her inviting God's Holy Spirit to fill and empower her, to *help* and *protect* her.

Young Ezra will be anointed today, he whose name means 'God helps and protects', as a sign that he too in his baptism will be filled with God's Holy Spirit. Our prayer for him is that he too will be a wise and faithful servant of the God who loves him more than he can know.

At our baptism, when we also were anointed, we were *commissioned* as members together of the 'royal priesthood' which is the Church of Christ. Whatever our 'day job', we each have a part to play in advancing God's reign here on earth. And that part will be ever-changing as we continue on our pilgrimage through life.

Last Sunday, as we celebrated Candlemas, the last day of the Epiphany season, we recognised that God calls each of us by name to be a 'light to the world'. Simeon had recognised that Jesus would become *the* Light of the world: that Jesus would succeed where God's chosen people, Israel, had failed. But he will only succeed if we, who together now make up the Body of Christ – the new Israel – respond to God's call.

During this short 'lull' of so-called Ordinary Time, between the 40 days of Christmas and the 40 days of Lent, we have an opportunity to reflect on the present moment, to recognise God's presence around us and his Spirit within us, and to say with a trustful heart, 'Here am I, send me'.

As we reflect on the present moment in these days of high winds, perhaps we can see afresh that the wind is a symbol of God's Spirit, God's breath. He is that close to us, always!

I close with a prayer, taken from the Book of Common Prayer and no doubt said often by Queen Elizabeth, which asks God by the breath of his Spirit to be with us in all that we do:

'Pre-vent us, O Lord, in all our doings with thy most gracious favour, and further us with thy continual help; that in all our works, begun, continued, and ended in thee, we may glorify thy holy name, and finally by thy mercy obtain everlasting life; through Jesus Christ Our Lord.'

Amen.