

Richard Chartres, the retired Bishop of London, met the late queen on many occasions, often leading services when she was present. He commented recently that Queen Elizabeth II was neither high church nor low church, but short church. Honouring her today, I plan to be short in the words that follow.

(prayer)

I've been in the presence of the late queen twice – once when she visited our children's secondary school, and I vividly remember the moment the school flag was lowered and the royal standard was raised, showing that she had arrived. She went on walkabout, and it was a great day, hearing her speak and seeing her gently greet wellwishers. The second was when Helen and I received an invitation from the Lord Chancellor to attend a garden party at Buckingham Palace – it's the sort of thing that when it arrives through your letterbox, you wonder if someone's playing a practical joke on you. It was genuine, and Helen and I had a great afternoon enjoying the sandwiches, tea and cake in the Buckingham Palace Garden. Again, we saw the late queen, but didn't get a chance to speak to her.

The reason I received an invite was because in my previous church, and indeed because there was no bishop of Rochester in post when I came here, she effectively appointed me, and I've got this amazing document with a red seal on it (show) which begins 'Elizabeth the second, by the grace of God.. defender of the faith. To the Archbishop Of Canterbury, Greetings – we present unto you our beloved in Christ The Reverend William John Musson and require you to admit him to be Vicar of Cudham and Downe.

Queen Elizabeth called me 'beloved in Christ' – what a thought! Her Christian faith was evident to all, and as you might know, there was a solemn, holy moment in her coronation service in 1953, not shown on the recordings, when she is anointed. The scriptures are full of references to monarchs being anointed – it's also the root of the word Christ – God's anointed one – what anointing symbolises, whether it's at a baptism, ordination or coronation is that it establishes a relationship with God. In our first reading, from the Prophet Isaiah, one whose own ministry began with a strange form of anointing, as the burning coals from the altar of God touched his lips, bringing him from a place of sin to a restored relationship, here he speaks prophetic words which point to Jesus Christ, the one whose birth 600 or so years after these words were written, Queen Elizabeth so often referred to in her Christmas broadcasts. In these moments at 3pm on Christmas Day there was a sense in which she was meeting us face to face, addressing us and reminding us of the person and work of the Jesus she knew and loved. Particularly in 2011 she wrote these words 'Finding hope in adversity is one of the themes of Christmas. Jesus was born into a world full of fear. The angel came to frightened shepherds with hope in their voices – 'fear not' they urged 'we bring tidings of great joy which shall be to all people.' In sharing the words of Jesus and following his way, serving our nation and the commonwealth, she took on board Isaiah's vision of one who, having been anointed, set apart by God, brought into a relationship with him through her coronation proclaimed good news to the poor, bound up the broken hearted, and comforted those who mourned. As we mourn the late queen, I wonder if we can take comfort from Isaiah's words about God's anointed one, Jesus Christ, the one who says to troubled hearts 'fear not', I am with you always, and assured those who mourn that God's peaceful blessing will be theirs.

Anointing is the work of the Holy Spirit of God whose gifting allows him to hold a fragile human person in faithfulness to this place where community can gather for restoration and renewal. There is no doubt at all that this was exactly what Queen Elizabeth believed about her role. It was a vocation for which she had been blessed and graced, and the anointing was at the heart of it. Sometimes at Windsor Castle she would show visitors her small book of daily devotions from the weeks leading up to the coronation itself—prayers and meditations that had been written for her by the then archbishop of Canterbury. It was obvious that these meditations had sunk in deeply, and that she still shaped her life according to what was laid out there. Towards the end of her life Queen Elizabeth appeared frail and fragile, though those amazing pictures of her at the age of 96 showing her still smiling face greeting and welcoming our new prime minister as she held out her hand will remain long and deep into our nation's history.

In our second reading St Paul knows that his end is near, and so passes on God's wisdom to his successor Timothy. He commends Timothy to preach the word, being prepared when the time is right and when it isn't to correct, rebuke and encourage. We will never know what Queen Elizabeth said in those hundreds of audiences to 15 prime ministers, but I'm sure it did include sharing some of her Christian hope and assurance, and words of correction, rebuke and encouragement – and as Paul said, with great patience at times too! Paul concludes 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. My warrant from Queen Elizabeth included that title 'defender of the faith', and I am so thankful to God she honoured that call. As years went on she became more and more explicit in her Christmas messages about the hope that was in her – she finished the race, she kept the faith.

Paul was confident that he would inherit the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, would award to him on the day of Judgment. As we've seen on TV or maybe for some of you in real life, Queen Elizabeth's coffin in Westminster Hall has on it the state crown. Our late Queen has laid down her earthly crown, and through her faith and trust in Jesus Christ has put on the crown of righteousness.

(turn to Queen) I apologise, your majesty, if this has turned out to slightly longer than the short church you enjoy.

I want to close with words from Queen Elizabeth herself - she said 'Jesus Christ lived obscurely most of his life and never travelled far. He was maligned and rejected by many, though he had done no wrong. And yet, billions of people now follow his teaching and find in him the guiding light for their lives. I am one of them.'

I wonder if you are one of them too? I wonder if you know for sure that the crown of righteousness can be yours too? In this time of reflection as we mourn our late Queen, may her example lead us to Jesus Christ, the Anointed King she served. Amen.