

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. 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 (no marmalade!), tea and cake in the Buckingham Palace Garden.

The reason I received an invite was because she effectively appointed me to Cudham and Downe 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. The late Queen called me 'beloved in Christ'!.

Her Christian faith was evident to all - there was a solemn, holy moment in her coronation service in 1953 when she is anointed, set apart by God for her calling as Queen. It was a vocation for which she had been blessed and graced, and the anointing was at the heart of it. 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 in our nation's history.

St Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4 'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith' and goes on to describe the 'crown of righteousness that awaits all who trust in the Lord Jesus. 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.

Queen Elizabeth once 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 might consider whether our late Queen's faith is something that speaks to your heart too?

Rev John Musson *Abridged version of a sermon preached on the day before the State Funeral – a full version can be found on the church website pcd.org.uk*