

## The Queen – 70 Years as Ambassador of Christ

6th February 2022

*A sermon preached by the Dean of Melbourne, the Very Revd Dr Andreas Loewe, at St Paul's Cathedral on the occasion of the Seventieth Anniversary of the Accession of Her Majesty The Queen, 6 February 2022:*

'For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life', The Queen said in a message to mark the first Christmas of this millennium in 2000. During her long reign, which we celebrate today, these values have been apparent in her leadership as Queen of Australia, and as head of the Commonwealth of Nations. Queen Elizabeth speaks openly about her deep Christian faith. For her 'the teachings of Christ have served as my inner light' ([Christmas Broadcast, 2020](#)), providing guidance and strength. Just as she reflected how she has drawn 'great comfort in difficult times from Christ's words and example'. By her own witness to the transforming power of Christ in her life, The Queen has been an extraordinary ambassador of the good news.

Tonight's lessons, from the [book of Proverbs](#) and the [Revelation of St John the Divine](#), reflect on what a life lived in close friendship with God may look like. They assure us that God calls all people to come close to him; invites all people to share the treasure that is his spiritual presence in our lives. They point us to a time when we will experience that presence not only in spirit but in person; the time when God himself will dwell among us, his people. And they call each one of us to work so that the divine vision for our world may become a reality, by becoming people who ourselves enter into Christ's ministry of reconciliation.

Our first lesson, from the book of Proverbs, is an extended reflection on what life may look like when we make the values and wisdom of God our framework for living. In our reading we meet the personification of these values, Lady Wisdom. Wisdom is never far away from people, we are told. She takes a stand, and invites all to find a framework by which they may lead lives pleasing to God: 'To you, O people, I call; and my cry is to all that live', she her voice (Prov 8.4). In the school of Wisdom, the inexperienced are offered instruction, the simple prudence; those lacking intelligence are imparted knowledge. People are trained in truthfulness and discretion; given sound advice on how to rule justly and govern rightly.

God's Wisdom is a gift costlier than silver, gold or jewels, yet is freely offered to all, our reading tells. All that is required to acquire Wisdom is a willingness to learn integrity, a commitment to be truthful, and a hatred of arrogance and evil. 'I, Wisdom, live with prudence; I attain knowledge and discretion; pride and arrogance and the way of evil, and perverted speech I hate', because 'the hatred of evil is the fear of the Lord' (Prov 8.12-14). A little later in the book, the writer comes back to this insight in words that will be very familiar to people of faith: 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding' (Prov 9.10).

The rejection of evil, truth telling, justice and right living, then, are the pillars of Wisdom; the qualities that underpin distinguished leadership. 'By me Sovereigns reign and rulers decree what is just', we read (Prov 8.15). Only a few months ago, at the beginning of the global Climate Summit in Glasgow, The Queen reflected on what makes leaders wise. This is what she said: 'For more than 70 years, I have been lucky to meet and to know many of the world's leaders. And I have perhaps come to understand a little about what makes them special. It has sometimes been observed that what leaders do for their people today is government and politics. But what they do for tomorrow, that is statesmanship' ([Message to the World's Leaders gathered at COP26, 2021](#)). Wise leaders think of, and actively work for, a better future for the world. The actions of wise leaders are for tomorrow, for generations yet unborn. This, I think, is what our first reading means when it consistently places truth, justice and wisdom first, and honours and riches second. Self-gain is just that: ephemeral. Centred on

today, it is often gone tomorrow. Wise leadership, on the other hand, is for tomorrow; working to make our world a better one, based on values that are lasting.

For people of faith, like The Queen, this has meant working to foster a sense of faith in the future. Soon after her Silver Jubilee, she gave expression to that ideal: 'The context of the lives of the next generation is being set, here and now, not so much by the legacy of science or wealth or political structure that we shall leave behind us, but by the example of our attitudes and behaviour to one another and by trying to show unselfish, loving and creative concern for those less fortunate than ourselves' ([Christmas Broadcast, 1978](#)). Having just become a grandmother, she herself committed to taking on the challenge of passing on the gift of faith-filled living to future generations: 'Christians have the compelling example of the life and teaching of Christ and, for myself, I would like nothing more than that my grandchildren should hold dear his ideals which have helped and inspired so many previous generations', she said then.

At the heart of Christian teaching stands the knowledge that all people may be made right with God, and may share in his friendship when they turn to him in faith. That by the life of Jesus, God has come to know profoundly and completely what it means to be human; and that by Jesus' suffering, God has shared in all human suffering. The hope of the Christian faith is that by the gift of Jesus' own life on the cross, we may be gifted life forever in God's presence through the power of his resurrection.

That faith is lived out by modelling in our lives and leadership the reconciling love of God. In an address to the General Synod of the Church of England, whose Supreme Governor she is, The Queen said: 'All Christians, as ambassadors for Christ, are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation. Spreading God's word and the onerous but rewarding task of peace-making and conflict resolution are important parts of that ministry' ([General Synod Opening Address, 2015](#)). During her seventy years of leadership, The Queen has been an outstanding ambassador of the ministry of spreading God's word and growing the seeds of his reconciling love by working for peace in the world.

Since assuming her high office on this day in 1952, The Queen has presided over the transformation of the Commonwealth from former colonies to independent nations; a task she has cherished and actively promoted. As part of the decolonisation of the Commonwealth of Nations, she has often spoken of the importance of facing up to the pain of the legacy of the empire—for example through the Northern Ireland peace process and the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in South Africa. 'The events [of the past] have touched us all, many of us personally, and are a painful legacy', she said at a historic visit to Ireland in 2011. 'We can never forget those who have died, or been injured, or their families' ([Dublin Castle, 2011](#)). For her, the model to living together as a family of nations is life in the family of God: speaking the truth so that righteousness may flourish, reconciliation may be sought, and past wrongs be set right.

Our second lesson, from the Revelation to John, shows us a world that has been transformed by the reconciling power of God. The 'first things', the things that cause evil and pain, that disfigure human dignity, have passed away. God has come to his own city to live in it. He himself will be its living sanctuary. Sun and moon are eclipsed by the splendour and brightness of his light. All created things are surpassed by the gift of his abiding presence. John's vision describes God's reign in terms of healing: from the throne on which he is seated flows a mighty river which will make whole the entire world, and heal it. It nourishes the trees whose fruits feed the world, and whose leaves make the nations whole.

Set free from falsehood and evil, reconciled and redeemed, the people of God, from every race and nation, will worship him because of the unique personal relationship of love that unites them: Their names will be engraved on God's hands, and his name on their foreheads. The vision John sets before us is how the rule of God's love will reconcile the peoples of the world and heal all conflict. And in response to that vision each Christian is charged to exercise their own commission to be an ambassador of that reconciling love in our broken world.

Many nations across the Commonwealth have shown the way of how such a ministry of reconciliation may be exercised. Last September, in her message to the people of Canada, The Queen reflected on Canada's Truth and Reconciliation process, and spoke of the challenges that still lie ahead. At a time when historic Catholic churches were defaced or burning because the truth of the suffering of First Nations children in residential schools had come to light, she said: 'I reflect on the painful history that Indigenous peoples endured in residential schools in Canada, and on the work that remains to heal and to continue to build an inclusive society' ([Message to mark Canada's first National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, 2021](#)).

Here in Australia, we still have to begin that process of truth telling, of deep and humble listening, and of acknowledging fully the harm done to Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in the name of colonisation. The way to deal with the painful legacy of our past is by telling the truth and, in the light of that truth, to strive to transform the situations that we inherited, The Queen knows: 'to bow to the past, but not to be bound by it', is how she expresses it (*Dublin Castle*, 2011).

Our actions in the work of telling truth and making reparation for past wrongs in our own nation will be costly, but is a vital step on the way to a more peaceful future. 'The benefits of our positive actions will not be there for all of us today: we none of us will live forever', The Queen acknowledged last year as she called for decisive action to save our planet at the Glasgow climate summit. The same holds true for the ministry of reconciliation. But the reward of people reconciled to one another far surpasses the labour of holding our nation accountable to the values to which we, as people of faith aspire—and to which we will, one day, be held to account. Working for a more just and peaceful future certainly is difficult, and often disheartening. But as The Queen said to the global leaders gathered in Glasgow three months ago: 'We are doing this not for ourselves, but for our children and our children's children, and those who will follow in their footsteps' (*Message to world leaders gathered at COP26, 2021*).

Today we give thanks for the long and outstanding ministry of our Queen as a defender of the faith, by being an ambassador for Christ and a minister of his reconciliation. We give thanks for her firm personal faith in Christ Jesus, and for the way in which she has lived out the values she professes, in her long and faith-filled leadership of this nation, and the family of nations that is the Commonwealth. We ask God's rich blessing on her and pray that she would be granted health and strength to continue her work to further this gospel vision of nations and people reconciled to one another and to God, that is reflected so powerfully in her leadership. And as we pray for her, we also pray for one another. May we each be given wisdom and insight, counsel, strength and success to share with The Queen in God's ministry of calling people to live together in peace, in the places in which we ourselves live, work and worship. Reconciled to one another; set free from injustice and fear; with faith in the future that God promises us.

Words of encouragement for this ministry from our Patron, St Paul: 'Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you' (Phil 4.8-9).