

Things are different now. The whole atmosphere of the country has changed since we heard the news on Thursday. Yes, we are in an official period of mourning, but we are *actually*, each of us I believe personally, mourning. Rationally it can be no surprise for someone of 96 – way beyond her four score years and ten - should die. Yet it has affected us more deeply than we could have imagined.

It is not just that she has commanded the respect, the admiration and the affection of millions across the world – including many who do not believe in the institution of the monarchy, a quite extraordinary accomplishment in itself. It is more than this. It goes deeper than this. For many of us it feels like we have lost a close member of the family. She has been with us and for us all our lives. She has truly loved us and served us and been there for us through thick and thin. This is not just about longevity, nor is it just about the ways in which we know she has served us and peoples across the Commonwealth and beyond. It is about the person she was, her character and personal qualities. Her life has reflected the very best of humanity, the best of what we could be.

King Charles, in his first speech as King, so profound and moving, so empathetic, touching our hearts, prayed his mother into heaven and to join her husband, Philip. He used the beautiful words of Hamlet ‘May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest’. It was also words from Hamlet, that came to my mind as soon as I heard news of her death. Mourning the death of another monarch, he said ‘We shall not look upon his like again.’ We shall not look upon her like again.

Our grief, shared with so many across the world, flows from our love for her. She, herself said ‘we would not grieve if we did not love’. We have heard and we have said so much about her in the last two or three days. How she has been a constant – a presence – a rock – a reassurance – a strength – a comfort. She has been an anchor in stormy seas. One who has herself faced stormy seas internationally, nationally, and indeed in her own family life. She has been an anchor for her personal family and an anchor for her extended family. That means us.

But what has been her own anchor? She has told us many times. In 2014 she describes Jesus Christ as ‘an inspiration and as an anchor in my life’. She has said ‘I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through good times and bad.’ This anchor has given her and us through her a stability. Above the febrile fray of politics, she has given the country a sense of stability. She has

helped us in the words of the 1939 poster at the outbreak of war to 'keep calm and carry on'.

But hers was not a narrow nationalist perspective. She had a profound sense of her wider family across the world, what she called the family of nations. Her faith was in God who has made all peoples in his image. One of her favourite Bible passages was the parable of the Good Samaritan, in which Jesus taught us that truly to love our neighbor means loving those who are not of our own kith and kin. It means reaching out across the cultural and religious divides. It is not the religious insiders who help the man beaten up and left for dead, it is the outsider, the Samaritan who demonstrated true love of neighbor.

I experienced a wonderful example of this boundary crossing to serve one who is different in Jerusalem when I was leading a pilgrimage. One of our Christian pilgrims fell and cut his head quite badly. Two people went out of their way to help him. One was a young Jewish soldier. The other a Muslim taxi-driver.

The Queen has given us cause for great patriotism but not narrow nationalism. She has helped us to look outwards in service to those in need irrespective of their background, faith or culture. Her life of extraordinary service is inspired by Jesus who, she reminds us in her 2012 broadcast, 'came not to be served but to serve'. She reminds us that serve others is not simply a duty but a joy. In her 2008 broadcast she said 'Jesus makes it clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving, more in serving than in being served.' Made in the image of God, the source of love and giver of all good gifts, we are, as it were made, not as in compelled but as in designed to give. When we give, when we love, when we serve, we become more truly our God-given selves. It is good for us. Warwickshire County Council recognized this in its good work on wellbeing, identifying 'giving' as means to good mental and psychological – and I would add spiritual - health.

The Queen has been a symbol and source of unity. She has been a unifier not a divider. She has been well-described as 'the golden thread that held us all together.' Perhaps the greatest tribute any of us can offer her is to let our own lives be influenced by her life. In the midst of our mourning there is so much for which we can give thanks to God in the gift that her life has been to us and to the world. She has, in the words of Hebrews, 'run with perseverance the race which was set before her, looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.' Truly a good and faithful servant. May she rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.