

Holy Communion During the Period of Mourning for Queen Elizabeth II

25 September 2022

A young layperson was away on a short sabbatical. Their ministry had become hopelessly muddled by the tyranny of the urgent and the politics of the church that they served. It was difficult to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit through all the noise at home, so they went away. Not really caring where, but only wanting to get some distance from the everyday, they accepted the invitation of a friend to visit Norway, of all places. There, sitting on a train between Oslo and Bergen, this young lay minister was finally able to sense what they were to do next: they were to return home and seek ordination. The message was clear – this was their “Paul on the road to Damascus” moment, and the young person was sure that they had discerned correctly. But they were terrified. Like Moses, they did not feel equipped to serve in such a capacity. Instead of looking out the windows at the beautiful scenery as the train rolled through the Norwegian mountains, this young person kept their eyes fixed on the floor of the carriage. Why? Because the words of Psalm 121 were echoing in their heart and in their mind. They knew, that if they looked up to the hills that surrounded them, they would know where their help in this calling came from. If you know beyond a doubt that your help is the very maker of heaven and earth, it becomes difficult to use feeling ill-equipped as an excuse for not assuming that which is entrusted to us.

When the train rolled to a stop in a town called Voss, the travel companion of this young person spontaneously decided that they should get off the train to explore. The two travellers wandered through the place and stopped at the shoreline of a mountain lake. The water was so still that it reflected its surroundings like a mirror. The young layperson who was still intentionally not lifting their eyes to the hills instead looked down. There, they saw in the waters of that lake what they had been trying to avoid for some time. It was the glorious sight of the mountains, as clearly reflects as if they were looking up at the real thing. Not only did they know in that moment that the maker of heaven and earth was their help, but that God’s help is not only practical; it is relational. We can be faithful because God is first faithful to us. We are called, not to do this or that on our own, but to participate in the Lord’s will, and the Lord’s work, with Him.

It would be more than understandable if a young Queen Elizabeth had felt a similar sense of fear and reluctance to Moses or this young minister as she realized the call that was placed on her life. This was not a path that she chose, so much as it was chosen for her. After all, she was not supposed to be Queen, nor was her father before her, but circumstance and perhaps providence led to her this duty: assuming the sacrifice and responsibilities of a life of service. Surely the Queen, who we understand to have been a person of great faith and demonstrable faithfulness, knew where her help came from.

No one, queens, kings, us regular Canadians, or otherwise are beyond needing such help. None of us can rise to our callings apart from God’s aid and provision. We humans are limited by time, the needs of our bodies, by our abilities, and by our brokenness. A vocation like being a parent, for instance, is a 24-7 responsibility, so while mothers and fathers need to sleep, we can

do so in the peace of knowing that our help comes from the Lord who neither slumbers nor sleeps. Those in authority may be tempted at times to abuse their power, but to those who are faithful, God promises to keep them from all evil; he will keep their life. For those, such as her Late Majesty, whose life was lived for the public, and was also scrutinized in a very public way, the promise that, "the sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night," offers assurance in knowing that the Lord protects the faithful against overt attacks and against those who would quietly plot against us.

Last week, our Gospel reading recounted the parable of a shrewd manager, who at the threat of losing his position acted, so that he would be welcomed into the homes of others. He was commended for seeking social reciprocity over dishonest wealth. If you watched any part of the Queen's funeral on Monday, you were among the over 5 billion people who welcomed the Royal Family into their home. As I sat watching the Queen's funeral, I was struck by how the entire service was one of worship; not of her as a monarch, but of Him whom she served; of the Lord who called and equipped her. Her life of service prompted over 5 billion people to respond by paying their respects in this small way. As so, because of her faithfulness over 5 billion people from across the world heard the gospel. We heard about the one whose very essence is faithfulness, that is our Lord Jesus Christ. What an amazing testimony to what God can do with an offering of faithful service.

Unless something quite miraculous and unexpected happens, none of us will ever share in the particular call that Queen Elizabeth received, except for this: remember that her first call as a baptized person was to communion with Christ Jesus. In this we all share. Trust that he will be your help. He will not let your foot be moved. The Lord is your keeper. The Lord will keep you from all evil. He will keep your life. He will watch over your going out and coming in forevermore.

As you go out from this place this morning, know the Lord, trust that he will equip you. Friends, just be faithful, and then delight in watching God do more than you can ask or imagine with your offering.

Amen.