

Preaching for Beginners

A Sample Sermon – Proverbs 31:25-31 – Archbishop Lord George Carey

Funeral Sermon of Queen Elizabeth, Queen Mother (9th April 2002)

1. What is good about the sermon?
 2. What was the Central Truth of the sermon?
 3. Did the sermon fail in anyway?
- The sermon was preached at the televised funeral service of Queen Elizabeth, The Queen Mother – a much loved woman who died at the age of 101 (in 2002).
 - The passage it is based on is: Proverbs 31:25-31

Notes

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Questions:

1. What is good about the sermon?

2. What was the Central Truth of the sermon?

3. Did the sermon fail in anyway?

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Sermon Text

This is the full text of the Archbishop of Canterbury's (George Carey) sermon at the funeral of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, at Westminster Abbey on 9th April 2002.

“We gather in this great abbey to mourn and to give thanks.

It is a fitting place to do so. A place where the story of our nation and the story of the woman we now commend to her Heavenly Father are intertwined.

It was here that Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon was married and became Duchess of York; it was here that she was crowned Queen; it was here that, as Queen Mother, she attended the coronation of her own daughter.

It is fitting, then, that a place that stood at the centre of her life should now be the place where we honour her passing.

In the 10 days since she left us, there have been countless tributes and expressions of affection and respect - including those of the many people who have queued and filed patiently past her coffin lying-in-state.

How should we explain the numbers?

Not just by the great length of a life, famously lived to the full.

It has to do with her giving of herself so readily and openly.

There was about her, in George Eliot's lovely phrase, "the sweet presence of a good diffused".

Like the sun, she bathed us in her warm glow. Now that the sun has set and the cool of the evening has come, some of the warmth we absorbed is flowing back towards her.

Strength, dignity, laughter

If there is one verse of scripture which captures her best, it is perhaps the description of a gracious woman in the final chapter of the book of Proverbs.

It says: "Strength and dignity are her clothing and she laughs at the time to come."

Strength, dignity and laughter - three great gifts which we honour and celebrate today.

The Queen Mother's strength as a person was expressed best through the remarkable dealings with people - her ability to make all human encounters, however fleeting, feel both special and personal.

As her eighth Archbishop of Canterbury, I can vouch for that strength.

Something of it is reflected in the fact that for half a century we knew her and understood her as the Queen Mother.

Maternal strength

It is a title whose resonance lies less in its official status than in expressing one of the most fundamental of all roles and relationships - that of simply being a mother, a mum, the Queen Mum.

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For her family, that maternal strength - given across the generations to children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren - has been a precious gift and blessing.

Its loss is felt keenly today.

And as they grieve, we say to the Queen and to Prince Philip; to Charles, Anne, Andrew, Edward, David and Sarah as grandchildren; and to all their children: you are in our thoughts and cradled in our prayers and those of countless millions round the world.

The very first letter Elizabeth wrote on becoming Queen in the traumatic and daunting circumstances of 1936 was to one of my predecessors as Archbishop of Canterbury.

It gives a further insight into the source of her strength.

She wrote: "I can hardly believe that we have been called to this tremendous task... and the curious thing is we are not afraid."

With her openness to people, indeed as part of it, came a quiet courage. A courage manifest in wartime and widowhood, a courage that endured to the end.

Strength, dignity and laughter.

There was certainly nothing remote or distant about her own sense of dignity.

Her smile, her wave, the characteristic tilt of her head: all made the point immediately and beyond words.

It was a dignity that rested not on the splendid trappings of royalty, but on a sense of the nobility of service.

On their wedding day here, the Archbishop of York spoke to the newly married couple of their life together: "We cannot resolve that it shall be happy," he said, "but you can and will resolve that it shall be noble."

And indeed it was. An unfailing sense of service and duty made it so.

Give thanks

It was a commitment nourished by the Queen Mother's Christian faith.

A faith that told her, as it tells us all, that even the Son of God came into the world as a servant, not as a master.

Strength, dignity and, yes, laughter.

We come here to mourn but also to give thanks, to celebrate the person and her life - both filled with such a rich sense of fun and joy and the music of laughter.

With it went an immense vitality that did not fail her. Hers was a great old age, but not a cramped one.

She remained young at heart, and the young themselves sensed that.

Of course, the laughter of the book of Proverbs goes deeper than a good joke or a witty reply.

"She laughs at the time to come": such laughter reflects an attitude of confident hope in the face of adversity and the unpredictable challenges of life.

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Of this laughter too, the Queen Mother knew a great deal. It was rooted in the depth and simplicity of her abiding faith that this life is to be lived to the full as a preparation for the next.

Her passing was truly an Easter death - poised between Good Friday and Easter Day.

In the light of the promise that Easter brings, we will lay her to rest knowing that the same hope belongs to all who trust in the One who is the resurrection and the life.

Strength, dignity, laughter - three special qualities, earthed in her Christian faith.

Qualities that clothed her life so richly. Qualities that with her passing, we too - by the grace of God - may seek to put on afresh, in our own lives and the life of our nation and world.

Let that be part of her legacy, part of our tribute.

And lastly this: for the book of Proverbs has more to say about a gracious woman; words we can summon now as we commend to her Heavenly Father his faithful servant Elizabeth - Queen, Queen Mother, Queen Mum - deeply loved and greatly missed.

It simply says of a woman of grace: "Many have done excellently, but you exceed them all".”

Source: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/1918590.stm>