

Christ Church, 7 May 2023 Coronation weekend

Call to worship (based on Psalm 138)

O Lord our God, we come together with songs of praise in our hearts,
because of your unfailing love and faithfulness.
Even though we struggle with life's issues, your mercy blesses us.

Listening God, we come together with prayers of thanks in our hearts,
because you hear and answer our prayers.
Even though life is sometimes difficult, your strength blesses us.

Welcoming God, we come together in reverent worship filling our minds,
because your faithful love endures forever.
Even though we are fragile people
who sometimes feel lost and abandoned,
God's love blesses us and never changes.
Thanks and praise be to our glorious God for ever and ever.

Hymn All creatures of our God and King R&S 39

Children's Time – Coronation quiz/fun facts

Gifts

Gracious God, receive these gifts that represent our love for you and our commitment to act for justice. On this Coronation weekend, when we celebrate as a nation and recognise all the good deeds done by volunteers, keep us mindful of those who do not celebrate a new monarch, those who have less chances in life due to the legacy of slavery, those who cannot afford their bills because of government policy, those who have to turn to foodbanks, even though they are working, because they do not earn enough. May these gifts and our service help bring about your kingdom – a kingdom of equality and justice, in Jesus' name we pray Amen.

Hymn The Servant King R&S 522

Opening Prayer & prayer of confession

Heavenly Father, we gather this morning with those who love You,
that we might sing Your praises and share Your love with one another.
You have shown Your faithfulness to us every day
in ways that we do not always recognise,
so we gather today in order to thank You for Your constant care over us.
Help us to entrust our lives to You and Your purposes.

Merciful God, we approach you asking for forgiveness,
For healing and reconciliation - to once again feel the power of your Love.
As individuals and as a nation we have tempted fate.
We have not done justice and loved kindness.
We have stretched our grasp with greed.
We have protected our privacy with isolationism.
We have ravaged your creation with entitlement.
Forgive us.
As we are forgiven, may we, with the readiness of a child, forgive others.
Those who have caused division and pain
Those who spread intolerance and prejudice
Those who destroy that which we try to build up.
Open our hearts to abandon prejudice and suspicion.
As we teach our children tolerance, may we be tolerant.
Use us to restore harmony that all may humbly walk with you
And feel the power of your love. This we pray in the name of Jesus. Amen

Assurance of grace

'Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families; it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.'

Queen Elizabeth, 2011 (p.42 in in *The Servant Queen: and the King she serves*, by Mark Greene & Catherine Butcher, published by Bible Society, HOPE, LICC, 2016

God of all, how kind you are to your people, for you forgive our sins
and are gentle with our shortcomings.

You hold back your displeasure and your anger never lasts for long.

It is what we need, this ever-present love and your saving hand when trouble comes.

We are listening to what you say, especially your promise that peace will come
when we turn from our foolish ways, then Love and Loyalty will hold hands,

Justice and Peace will embrace.

Even as we turn to find you, we find assurance knowing that you are looking upon us now. Amen

Revd Duncan Wilson (URC ordained Minister) writes contemporary versions of psalms for his project 'Praise from the heart: The Psalms in liturgical order'. Used with permission

Hymn Immortal, invisible R&S 67

Bible readings: **Psalm 138**
 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Today as we celebrate the Coronation, we reflect on how God chooses kings. Not only that Jesus is our king and we seek to bring in God's kingdom, which is so different from the earthly kingdom we live in here in the UK in the 21st century, but how God chose mortal kings and prophets – often the most unlikely, unsuitable or most reluctant choice and how that differs from the hereditary monarchy we have, which provides us with a king, not on merit, or wisdom, or ability to do the job, or willingness to serve, but on who his parents and ancestors were.

Last weekend, I read an interesting article about various people who had protested when Charles was proclaimed as King Charles III last September. I was shocked to read of how little they were arrested for – a woman who had allegedly held up a placard reading "abolish monarchy" was arrested in Edinburgh; Symon Hill was arrested for breach of the peace for calling out, 'who elected him' when the proclamation was read; but the most bizarre was a lawyer who was arrested for holding up a blank piece of paper outside parliament. "it felt like something we might read about in China or Russia" the article said. It seemed that any discussion of monarchy was met with action more similar to a totalitarian state rather than a democracy in Europe. What interested me most though, was that Symon Hill's action was based in his faith. "Hill's activism has always been bound up with his Christianity, much of his objection to monarchy derived from his faith: 'I don't understand how a Christian can agree to a proclamation declaring somebody other than Jesus to be our only king. I try to live by my faith all the time,' he adds. 'Obviously I often don't manage that. But things like

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trying to love your neighbour is a form of activism for me.’ Hill had not gone out that day with any intention of protesting, but his path had been blocked by the crowd gathered for the proclamation. He was later de-arrested.

Later in the week came the news that all of us would be invited to pledge allegiance to ‘the monarch in a “chorus of millions of voices” to be known as the Homage of the People. People around the UK and abroad [were] invited to say the words “I swear that I will pay true allegiance to your majesty, and to your heirs and successors according to law. So help me God”, in a declaration that replaced the traditional homage of peers.’ I had great respect for Queen Elizabeth and have always rather liked the pomp and circumstance of royal events. I have nothing against Charles as a person and I would not want a republic – the horror of Trump only strengthens the evidence that Joe Public can’t be trusted with elections and an elected head of state is no more likely to be suitable for the role than someone who has been trained and apprenticed for it their whole life, but the pledging of allegiance to another human being rather than God, seems to me a step too far. The basis of our faith in the United Reformed Church, the Nature, Faith and Order of the URC, which some of you will have said at the 50th Anniversary Service, just three weeks ago, says:

We believe that Christ gives his Church a government distinct from the government of the state.

In things that affect obedience to God the Church is not subordinate to the state, but must serve the Lord Jesus Christ, its only Ruler and Head.

Civil authorities are called to serve God’s will of justice and peace for all humankind, and to respect the rights of conscience and belief.

The coronation is “first and foremost an act of Christian worship. It is my prayer that all who share in this service, whether they are of faith or no faith, will find ancient wisdom and new hope that brings inspiration and joy.” Said the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and the central and private part of the ceremony, the anointing with oil is regarded as a moment between the monarch and God. This tradition of anointing goes back to the Old Testament in which king Solomon was anointed by Zadok the priest, and it was one of the medieval holy sacraments emphasising the spiritual status of the sovereign. And we heard how David was immediately anointed with oil – “The Lord said, ‘Rise and anoint him, for this is the one.’ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David.” In the ancient Near East, that is the ancient civilizations around the time of the Old Testament, such as Mesopotamia and

Egypt, the gods bestowed kingship on mankind. In Sumeria kingship was said to be “descended from heaven.” It was a gift from the gods and the king was therefore divinely chosen. Unlike Egyptian kings who were thought to be gods, Mesopotamian kings were, for the most part, considered to be selected by and ruled on behalf of the gods. The Israelites, although they only believed in one God, Yahweh, believed that kings were chosen by God and ruled on God’s behalf. They were to rule with justice and righteousness. We hear much about the nature of kingship from the prophet Isaiah who introduced the concept of the Servant king. We read many passages from Isaiah in Advent predicting the coming of Jesus as the king, and Messiah – the anointed one. ‘He is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of peace.’ He will establish and uphold the kingdom with justice and righteousness. In his first sermon, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, ‘The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed’, proclaim liberty and release of prisoners. Jesus is God’s anointed, at once a king in the tradition of Old Testament kings, chosen by God, to do God’s will on earth, and yet at the same time he is God – God made man, incarnate and immortal, the only king we should ever praise and honour.

God chooses kings based on different criteria to us. We heard in the passage from 1 Samuel, how Samuel went to choose the new king. He started with Jesse’s eldest son Eliab, but the Lord said do not look on his appearance or his stature, because I have rejected him. Samuel went through all the other sons until he got to the youngest, the one out on the hills tending the sheep, and that is who God chose. David turned out to be a less than ideal king in many ways, committing both adultery and murder, but that would be a different sermon... God has a habit of choosing leaders and prophets who are reluctant or perhaps not who we would think was cut out for the job – Moses was a stutterer, Jonah preferred to drown than be a prophet and Ezekiel was possibly mentally unwell, not to mention, again the crimes of king David. But the point is that God chooses them, it is not an accident of their birth, or because of their wealth.

Charles himself is a man of faith who has declared himself to be a faithful Protestant, and was anointed in private where we hope he felt the presence of God, so perhaps the request for us all to pledge allegiance to him was simply a misguided attempt at inclusivity and the new king actually does know his place in the scheme of things – namely not on a par with Jesus, the only king we pledge to follow.

Hymn Praise to the Lord R&S 74

Prayers of intercession

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Eternal God, You order and govern our world and all that is in it,
we pray that you would bless Charles and Camilla as the new monarchs of this nation,
that they may fulfil the roles prescribed for them,
and that we may, in this kingdom, be better governed,
and always reminded of your eternal Kingdom which is to come.

Lord God, Maker of heaven and earth.
You made magnificent mountains and the oceans,
the tiny worms and bugs, and everything in between. And, you made us.
You are amazing and powerful, yet you love each of us dearly.
Thank you for guiding our lives and ruling all of creation.
In the knowledge of your love and your power,
we bring before you our prayers for our world.

God of all of us who think we are too old or too poor or too small or too weak or too busy,
God of all of us daunted by the sheer wonder of the plan you lay out before us:
we come to you now, aware of all you have done for us, and yet still struggling with our doubts.
Birth us all anew, O God; hear us and help us on our journey.
We pray for this world where so many wander homeless
not by choice, but out of necessity,
where so many are looking for a great Name to rescue them.
We pray for all the people in this world, especially... (Sudan, Ukraine)
We pray for the women and men who lay down their lives
for the safety of brothers and sisters and neighbours... (climate change – floods in Uganda, Kenya)
We pray for those who lead us, especially today our new king, that he may continue the tradition of
service of his mother.
Birth us all anew, O God; hear us and help us on our journey.
We pray for all those who long for a new beginning:
those who are imprisoned,
those who are estranged,
those who have left loved ones behind,
and those who are ill or infirm, and those who mourn.
Give them all new life by the power of your Spirit.
Help us to see how we can be present with them as your hands and feet.
Birth us all anew, O God; hear us and help us on our journey.
We pray for the Church:
Give us the courage to leave everything behind and follow you.
Give us the faith to act on what we do not understand.
Bless us to be a blessing to everyone in your Name.
Birth us all anew, O God; hear us and help us on our journey.

Lord's Prayer

Hymn The Lord is King! R&S 76 (first tune)

Blessing

Let us put our hands into the hand of God and go out with joy
Awakened to the treasure within and around us,
To bring transformation, challenge and hope to the world.
And may the abundant blessings of God,
Source, Saviour and Spirit
Be ours today and always. Amen.