

TRINITY 13

This has been an historic, whirlwind of a week, has it not?

A new Prime Minister, the death of our beloved Queen Elizabeth, a new King proclaimed, Charles 111, and a new Prince and Princess of Wales. Such a range of emotions to feel and reflect upon. And so many words, commentators, and experts trying to keep up with every moment – so much so, you may already feel, like me, quite exhausted!

There's more to come, of course. This afternoon at 3.30p.m. you are invited to come and hear the Town Mayor's 'Proclamation' at 3.30pm outside the Shire Hall. And this will be followed by a short service here when St Mary's comes into its own as a Civic Church and prayers for our new King become the still centre of all that we hope for as a nation. Together, we call upon the wisdom and guidance of our Lord, for the months and years ahead.

If you think a little about our first reading, we see something in Moses wrestling with God about what brave and bold leadership is all about. When the Lord said to him: "I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are", how they have abandoned Him by worshipping a golden image of a calf, Moses implored God to relent, to change his mind, to remember the rich ancestry and spiritual examples of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In Charles' very moving and powerful first address as King to the nation, he remembered the wonderful legacy of his mother, that "profound personal commitment which defined her whole life" and in doing so, now takes on that tradition and mantle himself, as well as what he called, "that fearless embrace of progress, which makes us great as Nations."

The challenge is already out there it seems to me that "stiff-necked" people have stopped growing and flourishing as loving and generous,

inquisitive, caring, compassionate human beings. But with our prayers and focus begun and ended in God, and a sense of leadership that can still wrestle with so many changes and challenges in our everyday lives, there is no need to divide and separate the secular from the sacred. We need both spheres to meld them. We need the experience and commitment of both to make any leadership, inspirational.

If you think a little about our Gospel reading, we see something again about grumbling less, and rejoicing more! The scribes and Pharisees who said of Jesus that he welcomed sinners “and eats with them”, or yes, has marmalade sandwiches with them over a cuppa in the palace...they were wanting a different kind of leadership; one which was authoritarian only; one which was without any charm or humour; one which was unforgiving.

The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin really are inspirational because they are words from our Good Shepherd, the One still teaching us the hardest and most surprising and radical of lessons. Jesus doesn't want us to be stiff or stuffy and certainly not, self-righteous. He wants us to be more relaxed in our prayers and to seek out some spaces for quiet and attentive listening. He wants us to be fairer in how we govern and lead others, supporting the weakest and poorest, and bringing the marginalised into the centre. He wants us to let God guide our thinking and doing and to become again His committed, loosened- up, ‘rainbow people’.

Of course, history repeats itself however much our circumstances change. The roles of Moses and Jesus had much in common, so much so that you can hear or imagine an essay title: ‘Compare and contrast their Leadership roles’. For our own future and new beginning, will our nation be enlivened by a searching Christian faith as was the case for the ending of our Elizabethan era? Let’s hope so. And before we soon change the pronouns to sing The National Anthem for our new

King, let us ponder again a beautiful prayer used by Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother and make it our own:

“My God I desire to love thee perfectly with all my heart which thou madest for thyself

With all my mind, which only thou canst satisfy

With all my soul, which feign would soar to thee.

With all my strength, my feeble strength which shrinks before so great a task and yet can choose naught else but spend itself in loving thee.

Claim thou my heart. Fill thou my mind

Uplift my soul and reinforce my strength

That when I fail thou mayest succeed in me

And make me love thee perfectly.” Amen.