**Bishop Rosemarie’s Sermon at Evening Worship and the Presentation of the Bishop’s Certificate on 24 September**

As we gather here this afternoon, we also remember that only a few days ago hundreds of thousands of people made pilgrimage past and to this Cathedral, to pay their last respects to a woman whose Christian faith was the rock on which she stood for all her life, and the bedrock of her public service for 70 years, as she served this country and other nations as Queen and monarch.

The majority of commentary from individuals and institutions locally and globally around the world paid homage to the grace and humility of our late Queen, her devotion to duty, her constancy in service, her compassion, and her fidelity to her faith. Some others expressed republican and anti-colonial viewpoints. The rights of monarchic rule have been questioned, and they are of course legitimate conversations. However, no one chooses the family they are born into, but they can choose the way they live, lead, enable and serve the family that they become part of throughout their lives. For the Queen, the family she chose to dedicate her life in service to be the people of her nation countries, the Commonwealth, and the Church. She had no real qualifications for the role she acceded to, apart from what had been inculcated though the nurture of her family, and the way in which she learnt to live out her **vows**, to lead the church, to serve God and to be a Defender of the faith she professed with Christ as her compass and her inner light.

Today we come together in this same Cathedral Church to celebrate a cohort of faithful enquirers, who have pursued the Bishop’s Certificate course on discipleship to have their eyes further opened on how their faith can enable them to live and serve more fully in Jesus’ eternal kingdom. Unlike the Queen, they do have a qualification. But does the certificate confer on them anymore or any less than that which was conferred upon The Queen?

As we watched the unfolding of the various events to mark the life and death of the late monarch, a life lived in full public view, we were told of the way in which the Queen treated every person she met, giving them her full attention, listening to their story, and clearly living out the Christian belief that each human being is made in the image of God, worthy and precious in his sight. This is the message we also receive from Jesus in our gospel story today in the reading from Mark.

Over the period of mourning, we have seen the way in which crowds, people of every race, old folks, young adults, teens, children, turned out to meet the queen, and we can easily imagine the scene that Bartimaeus heard, as described by Mark. People had turned out in number to see the Rabbi, the healer, the teacher, the saviour, the son of David. As Jesus left Jericho with His disciples, a great multitude followed. The crowd was probably on their way to Jerusalem for the Passover. Blind Bartimaeus, was sat by the road begging. We know little of Bartimaeus, other than his name, his disability, and his lowly status. He certainly did not choose his family or his status, as he would certainly have been a marginalized outcast, ignored by the multitude as Jewish people believed that illness and disability were a punishment from God because the person had committed sins. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth passing by, he cried out, ignoring those who warned him to be quiet. “**Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”** And Jesus **heard** and called him forward. Jesus asked, “What do you want Me to do for you?” The blind man said, “**Rabbi, I want to see**.” Jesus replied, “**Go** your way; **your faith has made you well**.” And immediately he received his sight and **followed** Jesus on the road.” This event took place just days before Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem and his ultimate crucifixion. This event is the last miracle that Mark records in his gospel.

So, what can we, as followers and seekers after Jesus, learn from Bartimaeus’ story and also from the life our late monarch, two people so vastly different, in time and space, and in lived experience?

None so blind as cannot see. Although Bartimaeus was blind, he recognised Jesus’ presence, and his salvific powers, unlike others who could see Jesus but did not acknowledge him as the saviour. There are many in our world that are blind to the gospel and to the saving power of Jesus. Without seeing any of his miracles, Bartimaeus believed, and set his hope on Jesus as he passed by. Bartimaeus ‘faith was revealed by the way he had recognized Jesus for who he was, and through his healing mercy, Jesus opened Bartimaeus’ eyes to the world around him. This was also true of our late queen, for her eyes were truly open to the presence of the Lord in her life and throughout her life. We only need to listen again to her Christmas messages to get a sense of that. Do we sufficiently recognise Jesus in our lives and in the world around us? **How does what we have learnt and what we know through lived experiences help us to live out our faith, every day, in word and action, in spirit and truth.**

The other key characteristic that we know about Bartimaeus was that he was poor. He sat by the roadside and begged. Each day as we walk to and from this Cathedral, and probably on many of our high streets we come across people like him often with signs asking for money for a hostel or for food, like Bartimaeus dependent on people’s generosity to survive another day. Bartimaeus could have been bitter and angry about his situation, blaming God. Instead, he cried out to Jesus. Above his economic poverty Bartimaeus understood his deeper needs. He believed that the Lord could heal him, in body and in spirit. He must have done otherwise why would he have called out. In 1980, she said “in difficult times we may be tempted to find excuses for self-indulgence and wash our hands of responsibility. When the Queen experienced her **annus horriblilis**, in 1992, her wealth, power and status were no shield from the difficulties she faced. In poverty and wealth, both Bartimaeus and the Queen set their hopes on Jesus to raise them up, to lead them through their challenges, to meet their needs. Despite life’s circumstances they expressed their faith and gratitude in faithful discipleship, letting all others know. **Do we live our lives that way?**

They say a week is a long time in politics, and what a week we have seen. Many of the things that seemed to go into abeyance during the mourning period are back on the agenda. Covid continues to affect the health and wellbeing of many and create havoc for the NHS. The cost-of-living crisis seems to get worse by the day. Strife and upset stalks some of our communities across the country. It may seem hopeless, and we may feel powerless, but we know that we have someone that we can cry out to in our pain and helplessness. **Jesus! Son of David!**

Neither the Queen nor Bartimaeus got an **“ology”** in following Jesus, but they were faithful disciples. The certificate will not make you better disciples, just perhaps more informed members of Christ’s family. After the training however, the real work of discipleship continues, putting into practice how we who profess the faith, how we can lead, enable, and serve as we follow Jesus and defend the faith. Let us continue to put our faith into action, into building up our common life, working for the common good with a focus on the experience and needs of every individual, with a belief in our qualities and our strength, setting an example to the world which will encourage … people everywhere. Let us go forward to love and serve with seeing eyes.

I want to end with a poem from Langston Hughes, and African American 20th century poet, about seeing eyes.

I look at my own body

With eyes no longer blind—

And I see that my own hands can make

The world that's in my mind.

Then let us hurry, comrades,

The road to find.