

SERMON FOR CORONATION SUNDAY, 2023

by Jonathan Poston

Well what happened yesterday?
All I can say is “Wow”

It's like everything on every possible level was firing on all cylinders.
Maybe it was just me but my senses were completely overwhelmed with what I was experiencing.

It was like the best of everything rolled into one.

I'm talking about the Coronation by the way just in case you didn't realise.

On one level it was choreographed like a massive military operation.

On another it was like a huge blockbuster movie, only it was a living historic event in real time.

Everyone played their part perfectly. And when I wasn't looking at the King I couldn't take my eyes off Penny Mordaunt who was dressed so beautifully and, in her role as Lord President of the Council, carried the sword like a larger than life archetypal figure.

It was also one of those rare moments when I felt incredibly proud to be a member of the Church of England.

All faiths – quite rightly – participated, but it showed that at the centre of our society is the Monarch and the Church.

It was a showcase to the world of who we are at the root of our society and – unfashionable though it may be to say - many British people will have been proud to be British yesterday.

But the big question that we should not be afraid to address is:

Does any of this really matter?

Is it worth retaining a monarchy?

The short answer is, of course it matters.

But if you don't have a grounding in Christian faith, and if British history and the events of the past that shaped the civilization we live in today, doesn't interest you, or if you

have no understanding of how our democracy has been shaped by history and come into being, and if symbolism which speaks of something much greater than itself is something you are not prepared to engage with, then all you will see when you look at the royals is a dysfunctional family like yours and mine, and an awful lot of money being spent, and you might want to protest against something that you don't really understand.

But I actually feel a little sorry for those who were unable to appreciate yesterday's extra-ordinary event. There was so much to immerse oneself in.

If nothing else one couldn't help but be transported by the wonderful ceremony and incredible music and everyone's total dedication to delivering their best.

The whole event showed how we can dignify our humanity when we focus, and give our all, for a collective purpose.

But I want to talk about the 4 things I mentioned to highlight how important they are to us.

One: Putting oneself under God,
 Two: an understanding of how our past has shaped our present,
 Three: an understanding of how our democracy works
 and Four: an appreciation of the symbolism of hierarchy.

Firstly - Putting oneself under God

One thing not really discussed very much in the media in the run up to the Coronation, but was very much highlighted within the Coronation itself, was that this was a deeply religious ceremony. It was particularly familiar to many of us who are used to traditional Anglican worship.

The anointing with holy oil, and the blessing and crowning of the monarch, is a very special type of ordination. Like a priest, the King is making his allegiance to God and to the people.

What also comes across is how fortunate we are that, even though we reach out to other faiths, we have a Christian King. A King who only wields power as a Servant King, and one who is committed to the Christian commandments to love and serve God, and to love and serve neighbour as oneself.

The idea of hierarchy is not a popular concept these days when everyone wants to have their say, and we focus on the voices of the marginalised. But hierarchy holds society together. And at the top of our society we still have a King or Queen figure

committed to the idea of sitting below God and serving the people, and this affects our society whether we realise or not.

So my second point is that having a monarch with an ordination vow to God at the head of our democracy, holds our democracy together in a particular and special way. If the Church of England was dis-established and was therefore no longer linked to the state, and if the monarch disappeared, we would have a very different type of democracy. Our figurehead would not be a monarch rooted in our history, ordained into his or her post, serving God and the people. Instead we would have our own Macron, or Trudeau, or Berlusconi.

In fact our own Boris tried at one point to lead in an unaccountable way, like an American president, by ignoring the House of Commons and its roots in our Democratic hierarchy and process. You can make up your own minds on whether or not you thought that was a good idea.

So our democratic hierarchy of Crown (under God) and our democratic state coming from that may need some reform, but I think if we dismissed the monarchy, we would soon start to feel what we have lost, as the foundations of our democracy would start to wobble.

The third thing we need to be aware of is our history and the events of the past that have shaped the civilization we live in today.

There are those who would try and throw everything away and start again, but it has taken us a long time to end up with the gift of what we have. We certainly don't have the understanding in our present culture to fundamentally change these structures. There is too much naïve drum banging of various interest groups and not enough considered wisdom.

And the final thing that is important that is often ridiculed is our traditions and ceremonial.

The symbolism behind the various items of regalia that were offered to the king are full of meaning. They are not empty gestures. The very pavement, the Cosmati Pavement, which is a tiled area in front of the high altar, was designed to symbolise the world, or the universe, and its end. The king's coronation chair is placed at the centre of it. There are symbols within the tiles such that the king's chair sits between the sun and the moon.

At the bottom of the chair is set, for the ceremony, the Stone of Scone, also known as the Stone of Destiny. It was originally used in the coronation of the monarchs of

Scotland and, after the 13th century, the coronation of the monarchs of England and the United Kingdom. It is also known as Jacob's Pillow Stone.

Now those of you who know their bible will remember the story of Jacob who took a stone as a pillow, laid his head upon it and had a dream in which he saw a stairway or ladder with angels ascending and descending on it.

Then in the New Testament, Jesus alluded to this, saying to Nathaniel: Very truly I tell you, you will see 'heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on' the Son of Man."

This is what the coronation chair represents.

With Jacob's Pillow below, the Stone of Destiny, representing the centre of our land, the King is the ladder. The King represents the Christ figure and the circular Crown is the symbol of heaven that sits on his head. Thus for us he is a Christ-like figurehead at the very centre or the very top of our society. Now Charles is worthy of this about as much as I am worthy to represent Christ breaking bread within a Eucharist service – but it is not about him. It is about what he represents for us.

In all good mythologies when the land is sick and there is war and in-fighting, everyone hopes for the return of the one true king, who can act as a figurehead to give proper order to things.

Let's not forget the power of our national symbols and mythologies that hold us together. These things are not made up, or pretend. They are important parts of our collective and national and individual consciousness. It's important we understand just how they hold us together when storms blow and challenges come to meet us.

So I have no hesitation in inviting you to join in with me in saying: God save the King!

Amen