



CHELMSFORD
CATHEDRAL

Nicholas Henshall Dean of Chelmsford

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Dear friends and colleagues across the Cathedral Community,

Jubilee Reflections

Haile Selassie, the last Emperor of Ethiopia, was often photographed with his lions - sometimes feeding them in his garden; sometimes intimidating visitors as he sat on his throne with a chained lion on either side. He also had some very colourful royal titles: King of Kings, Lord of Lords, and Conquering Lion of the tribe of Judah. He certainly knew how to project power. Even the grand Cathedral he built for himself in Addis Ababa is all about power - based (bizarrely) as it is on Bath Abbey, the grand English Church where he worshipped when in exile here. He even called it the Selassie Cathedral (though to be fair, Selassie means "Trinity"). His is a model of monarchy that stalks the history books down the centuries. Absolute power commanding absolute obedience, with or without the lions.

By contrast, that kind of coercive power has not been the theme of our own monarch's platinum jubilee over this weekend. In fact - matching her character - it has been quite the opposite. On village greens, at street parties, in great cathedrals, there has been a wholly different narrative - not about power but about service. Last Sunday here in the Cathedral Bishop Roger returned again and again to that word - service. The Queen's commitment above all to serve from the first moment of her accession.

Not a remote monarch on a throne, but a sense of closeness, common humanity, shared values. Somehow a monarch above politics and yet deeply "political" in the original sense of that word: having a concern for our common life, the common good, our flourishing together as citizens.

Most preachers this morning are probably struggling to make the link between the platinum jubilee and the feast of Pentecost, one of the four great feasts of the western Christian calendar. But just maybe Pentecost is a gift here.

Pentecost is one of the Jewish pilgrim feasts when Jews from all over the world were encouraged to be in Jerusalem. That's why the crowds are there in such numbers in this morning's first reading. At the time of Jesus, the Jewish feast of Pentecost was beginning to lose its significance as a major harvest festival and instead it was becoming a festival celebrating the giving of the law. That is important: on the day the Jewish nation gathers in Jerusalem to celebrate the power of law, Luke tells us that this precisely the moment when God pours out his Spirit, breaking down barriers of language and culture. It's a contrast we are very familiar with in the writings of Paul: law versus spirit. The law the constricts and the spirit that sets free. In today's reading we see that enacted. The Spirit supercedes or perhaps better fulfils the law.

And what gifts does the Spirit bring? St Paul is quite specific. He writes in Galatians 5.22-23: "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law." A key text from probably the earliest document in the New Testament.

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Paul recognises that these don't come naturally. In the first place they are God's gift to us and in the second place we need to respond, to embed them in our lives - actively practicing love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

That doesn't come easily to us. It's so much easier - as Paul spells out again and again in his letters - to live out of our worst instincts - bitterness, unkindness, and so on.

And what has this - the day of Pentecost and Paul's great list of the Spirit's gifts - what has this to do with Jubilee. Well, not much if we are talking about the biblical jubilee. In the Bible "jubilee" is every 50th year when all land is redistributed, and all slaves are freed. So actually quite important - jubilee as a celebration of social justice.

But what about this contemporary jubilee? Well, those themes play out pretty well: the Queen as enabler; the Queen as a figure who crosses boundaries; who holds together rather than drives apart; the Queen as a lasting gift to a culture that regularly seems to lose its bearings. The Queen who has come to be for many an icon of precisely the love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control of which St Paul speaks. A queen who wears her power lightly and uses it to serve. A Queen who walks with corgis rather than feeding lions.

Haile Selassie's lions - or their descendants - are still there, housed in a rather bleak zoo in Addis Ababa. In the quiet of the night you can still hear them roar. Our Queen's choice of corgis speaks a better language.

With my thanks and best wishes.

Nicholas

