**Coronation Sermon, Salisbury Cathedral 7th May**

Like many clergy, I suspect, I felt unusually nervous during much of yesterday’s coronation service. Although only watching from my sofa, it was all I could do not to pace up and down. Like King Solomon before the dedication of the temple, one wondered how the abbey walls could contain without quaking all the keyed-up expectation and divine aspiration of those moments? So many steps and trailing garments, so many priceless objects & ancient phrases to stumble over – let alone managing before the world’s media the everyday bane of clip-on radio mics on rustling ceremonial robes. I don’t know about you, but in that electric tension I could not sit still until they were out of the abbey.

But of course, it falls to such occasions to achieve just this miracle – of glory somehow filling ordinary places and people: people (and institutions) that do fumble and fall, and yet know they are called to far more than might normally be possible: to marvels of coordination, community, and beauty. It is precisely that meeting point between impossibly gilded ideals and the reality of a British bank holiday that stirs us somehow – of majesty dwelling amid wet bunting and cold quiche. There is what Bagehot called “local holiness” sitting at the centre of our national constitution, and despite all that assails and divides us, occasions like this recall us to perhaps the brightest jewel in its crown – an idea older and more perfect than the Augustine Gospels, but contained therein, which is simply this:

*“The greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.”*

The teaching of Christ, that we must unapologetically reclaim and proclaim, is that much is expected of those to whom much is given; that privilege and responsibility are two edges of the same ceremonial sword, and that the first among us must become the last if we are truly to live. For if the world is to be saved from itself and the looming crises of our times are to be met face-on, we must be turned upside down and inside out, and empty ourselves before being filled. Which is why the most potent moments in yesterday’s Coronation were surely those when a child questioned their monarch whether they could do this, and when his finery was stripped to a simple tunic and so privately anointed for a life of such public service.

Each of us – and, I suggest, each of the institutions and organisations we represent - needs our own version of that transformation. To be reminded of our limitations and failures, our inability to be all that we would or should be, before determinedly aiming and aiming again for the highest standards of duty and service. For only in those canopied moments of truth do we realise, dear friends, that **higher causes require higher powers**. That vocations bring *in*vocations – bring us to our knees to call upon help beyond ourselves – indeed, to the God whose vast reservoirs of love, faithfulness and self-sacrifice are offered to us anew this day and every day.

It can be costly to our pride, but vital to our survival and success that we re-learn the art and standards of service given us in Christ Jesus. And if we find the gate to the palace too strait, too narrow, then we must at these pinch points reduce our ranks like those marching yesterday did – from twelve to six - with such exquisite precision, we must lessen ourselves to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

May it be so for us, and may God save and preserve our king for this calling, in Jesus’ name. Amen.