

Friday 5th May 2023

**Civic Service for on the Eve of the Coronation of their Majesties King Charles III and Queen Camilla
Mother Emma**

“Coronation fever” has played a significant role in the nation’s discussion, debate and media reporting over recent weeks. Who will attend? Who will NOT attend? What does this event mean for us personally and for the life of our nation? Who will play a part in the ceremonies? Which of the ancient traditions will be retained, and which laid aside, in deference to modern sensitivities and greater understanding of potential hurt to people or to Creation?

We have heard the voices of those in favour of monarchy and those against; expressions of respect and admiration and of criticism and pain.

But now we stand on the Eve of the Coronation itself, and whilst we are aware that this will still be a moment in history experienced more favourably by some than by others, our focus tonight is that tomorrow one man will stand before God, promising to serve him faithfully and, under him, to serve his people. We come together to pray for God’s gifts for King Charles III and Queen Camilla, and our readings remind us of what those gifts might be.

Our first reading came from the Wisdom literature in the Hebrew Scriptures, often closely associated with King Solomon, and with Biblical ideals of leadership. When Solomon became King, the Lord asked him what gift he would like. Solomon asked, not for riches or honour, but for wisdom and understanding, and the ability to discern between good and evil, which he saw as the essential attributes needed to govern a great people.

In our reading, we hear the voice of Wisdom personified, as she reminds humanity that *“Wisdom is better than rubies, and all the things that may be desired are not to be compared with it.”* Wisdom enables us to discern and to speak the truth, to turn away from pride and arrogance and towards humility and what the King James translation of the Bible calls *“excellent things”*. By her, Wisdom tells us, *“Kings reign, and princes decree justice.”*

Wisdom in the ancient world was seen as a practical trait; it includes not only integrity and understanding, but also a recognition of God’s gifts and resources, alongside the ability to create a culture of fairness and compassion. We are told:

“God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore... He spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five.

And he spake of trees, from the cedar tree that is in Lebanon even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall: he spake also of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes."

All of God's people and his creation are included within the understanding of the wise man, and those in leadership are called to honour them and to treat them with honesty and justice.

It is well-known that King Charles has spent his life – as did his father before him – engaging with the natural world and with concern for the environment, and he has made clear that this is one of the three particular concerns which he hopes will be reflected in his reign, and in which he calls us all to share.

He also emphasises the importance of charitable work; of the need to seek out the poor, the disadvantaged and the suffering and to help them, above all, to develop the skills and the resources they need to find hope and purpose.

And we know, too, that he believes passionately in the need for religious freedom; for a space in which we can listen for the voice of God and see beyond the material desires, fears and limitations of our day-to-day lives. But the King also takes seriously his role within the Church of England and sees his place as King only as a servant to God himself.

At the start of the Coronation service tomorrow, a child will greet him with the words: *"Your Majesty, as children of the Kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings."*

The King will respond: *"In his name, and after his example, I come not to be served but to serve."* He will then stand for a moment in silent prayer, his head bowed, as he acknowledges that, as we shall sing in our final hymn, it is to Christ that true glory belongs.

At this point, and also tonight as we come shortly to light candles to pray for the King and Queen, perhaps we might echo some of St Paul's prayer, included in our second reading from the Epistle to the Ephesians, that the King and Queen, together with all God's people, may be *"strengthened with might by [God's] Spirit in the inner man; ...; may be rooted and grounded in love ... and may know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that we may be filled with all the fulness of God."* We pray that God will grant Their Majesties wisdom, strength, compassion, humility and joy.

Amen