

Column

Following the much-lamented death of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, I recalled a story about her great grandmother Queen Victoria. It seems a sermon had been preached at St. George's Chapel, Windsor, on the Second Coming of Christ that touched her. Following the service, she told her chaplain Dean Farrar, "Oh, how I wish the Lord would come during my lifetime." When asked why, she responded with deep emotion, "Because I should so love to lay my crown at His feet."

Would that the ruler of every nation saw things as clearly as Queen Victoria. The exalted, risen Christ was the true King, while temporal rulers, herself included, were only under-shepherds of God's people. Hence, their role was to serve.

During her 70-year reign, Queen Elizabeth clearly shared her great grandmother's understanding of the role of Christian kings and magistrates. In a speech aired over the radio on the occasion of her 21st birthday, she pledged: "I declare before you all that my whole life whether it be long or short shall be devoted to your service . . ."

Never once did she waiver from this commitment. One prays that the mantel of selfless service she wore will fall on the new king and indeed on all who bear the authority of government around the world.

The ideal of greatness and service going together, though, goes back much further than Queen Elizabeth or even Queen Victoria. It comes from the Bible. In the Old Testament, we find the sad tale of King Rehoboam. Following the death of his father King Solomon, his subjects asked him to reduce the burdens placed on them by his father.

Before saying, yes or no, Rehoboam consulted some older men who had served his father. Their advice was: "If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever" (1 Kings 12:7). Sadly, he did not take their advice and as a result lost most of his kingdom.

Also in the Old Testament, in Ezekiel 34, we find the Almighty's denunciation of 'shepherds' (rulers over His people) who have fed themselves and not the sheep, who have been derelict in their servant duties. God's response comes in the form of both a warning and a promise. Speaking through the prophet, He

says those bad shepherds are going to be removed and He Himself is coming to be the shepherd over His people.

In the New Testament, we find this promise coming true in and through Jesus. He is King of King and Lord of Lords and the great exemplar of service. Addressing His disciples on one occasion, He said rulers out there in the larger world did it one way, they demanded to be served; His followers, be they great or small, kings or peasants, were to do it quite another, they were to serve, following His own example (Mark 10:45).

As their Britannic majesties Victoria and Elizabeth heard and heeded the Master's call to serve, so may we, even as we await His glorious coming and endless reign.

O LORD our heavenly Father, whose blessed Son came not to be ministered unto, but to minister; We beseech thee to bless all who, following in his steps, give themselves to the service of their fellow men. Endue them with wisdom, patience, and courage, that they may strengthen the weak and raise up those who fall; and, being inspired by thy love, may worthily minister in thy Name to the suffering, the friendless, and the needy; for the sake of him who laid down his life for us, the same thy Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.