

## Address by Ash Leighton Plom for 18 September 2022 at St David's Church

Generous God, guide us today as we ponder your word, and in all our days as we steward what you have given each of us. Amen.

Good morning once again, and for anyone who's new or joining online or otherwise doesn't yet know me, my name's Ash.

It fell to me to lead livestreamed Morning Prayer nine days ago when, as the BBC put it, "For the first time in more than 70 years, the UK greet[ed] a morning without Queen Elizabeth II as its monarch... In Paris the lights of the Eiffel Tower were switched off, a French landmark cast into darkness in honour of a British Queen." Official periods of mourning were declared in Canada, where the Queen was head of state, and in Brazil, where she was not.

Today, we are nearly at the end of that official period of mourning, with Her Late Majesty's state funeral tomorrow, but I wonder how much longer the unofficial mourning will continue, for some of us. The Very Revd Jonathan Greener, Dean of Exeter Cathedral, said, "for most of us, she has been the mother of the nation our whole life long... For many of us this loss feels very personal..."

I also read a republican journalist - who wants to abolish the monarchy - write: "I am a republican, always have been, and yet I now feel a great sense of loss. And not only because a 96-year-old mother, grandmother and great-grandmother has died, which is always an occasion for sadness... No, also because Elizabeth II represented something incredibly important. She embodied values that are at risk of extinction... public service in an era of self-worship and self-regard."

I think I'd comment that this commitment to service was because of her Christian faith, her life lived as Christ puts it in our Gospel reading, as "a person of the light", which she testified to especially in recent years.

In light of our scriptures today, I want to talk about serving others with whatever God has given us. This seems a difficult ask with all we've been pouring out recently, with inflation and the cost of living impacting us, but also timely in light of all of us reflecting on the Queen's service of others, and sandwiched as we are today between the Heritage Open Days last weekend at St Michael's and the Green Event at St David's Church next weekend, both of which give us opportunities to think about stewardship of what God gives us.

The rather strange parable we've had today is, ultimately, about how people use their resources, but it's probably not the first passage of Scripture you think of for godly Christian behaviour. Shrewdness is not usually extolled as a Christian value! We don't see it in the Sermon on the Mount, for example: "Blessed are the shrewd, who misappropriate their master's wealth for their own gain..."

The parable we've had is a bit of a problem, then, because the lead character, the unjust dishonest man, is hardly a rolemodel for Christian character. He's accused at the beginning of wasting his master's possessions, and then, when he's fired, he actually sabotages his master's business to buy himself a retirement with hospitality won with his master's wealth. And incredibly his master commends him for this!

But these unjust dishonest men are not meant to be role-models, and are exposed by Jesus as not "people of the light", in verse 8, but "people of the world": "The master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the people of this world are more shrewd... than are the people of the light".

So, shrewdness is not a Christian virtue, hence the warning we had in our first reading, from Amos, against those "who trample on the needy".

But if the shrewd man is not a rolemodel, then why did Jesus tell us this story at all? Well, straight away, Jesus explains an immediate application: he tells us to use what we have for the benefit of others.

Pagan kings were buried with the stuff they had amassed during their lives, because they hoped to take their riches with them into eternal life.

But Jesus confronts this concept and says, "give what you have away, and it will be credited to you in heaven". Not "be buried with your stuff and have it again in heaven." Give it away. Share it joyfully with others.

So, maybe it's time to ask, what has God given you to give away?

And this is not just about money. Everything in heaven and on earth is the Lord's, so anything we have is his, and he wants us to steward it righteously. That might include your time, your skills, your prayers. Indeed, the greatest single gift God has given to each of us is himself, so you might be able to tell someone about his grace in your life. You might be able to encourage someone to think about his work in their lives. You might be able to give someone a resource from Bridge Books, our local Christian bookshop at Exe Bridges, to help them receive him in their lives. You might be able to invite someone to connect with church.

The Green Event next week, and our Harvest Festivals coming up, give us good opportunities to invite people from our networks to join our celebration of the things God has given us. But in these coming weeks when we may all be budgeting anyway, I want to say: remember to share whatever God has given you. It may be that you're in a position to set up or increase your direct debit to church, so we can be generous as a church family, but it may be that God is calling you to share other resources – your time, your skills, your prayer, his grace – with those around you.

And do come to the Green Event, and share about it with others, as we explore ways of living more sustainably together on God's earth. For decades before he became King, Charles III was known as an environmentalist, for years before it became a mainstream thing. I wonder if it's especially apt, to remember both the servant-

heartedness of his late mother, and an issue close to our new King's heart, as we move forwards next week, out of the state mourning period, into his reign, by re-committing to cherish God's earth.

Amen.