

Archbishop Stephen gave a tribute to Her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II in the House of Lords - check against Hansard

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My Lords, like most bishops from these benches, I have stories to tell. Stories to tell about doing jigsaws in Sandringham on a Sunday evening, stories of barbecues in the woods in Sandringham in the middle of January. I've even got a slightly scurrilous story about healing the Queen's car. Well maybe I will tell it. I had preached in Sandringham parish church, we were standing outside. The Bentley was there to get the Queen, the Bentley didn't start. It made that throaty noise that cars make in the middle of winter when they're not going to start. Everybody stands there doing nothing. I'm expecting a policeman to intervene. Nothing happens.

Enjoying the theatre of the moment I stepped forward and made a large sign of the cross over the Queen's car to the enjoyment of the crowd. There were hundreds of people there, it was the Queen. I see the Queen out of the corner of my eye looking rather stony faced at this point. And I think well perhaps I've overstepped the mark. Anyway the driver tries the car again and praise the Lord the car started. The Queen gets in, she goes back to Sandringham, I follow in another car. When I arrive at Sandringham as I come in to lunch, the Queen with a beaming smile says, oh, bishop, it's the bishop, he healed my car.

Two years later, when I was greeting her at the west front of Chelmsford cathedral, just as a very grand service was about to start, and we're all dressed up to the nines. She took me to one side and said oh bishop, nice to see you again. I think the car's alright today. But if I have any problems, I'll know where to come.Â

And then when I became the 98th Archbishop of York during COVID. And I paid homage to the Queen by zoom conference, I was in the Cabinet Office where actually, everyone had forgotten to bring a Bible, including me, there was one in the Cabinet Office, which is kind of reassuring. Just as the ceremony was about to begin, the fire alarm went off. And we all - she was at Windsor Castle, I'm in the Cabinet Office, we all troop out on to onto the road. And we're out there for about 20 minutes until they can check it was a false alarm, you can go back in again. And when I went back into the room, and there was the screen, and there was the late Majesty, waiting, just waiting for things to begin again. And I don't know why I found myself coming back and returning to that image of her faithful watching and waiting through those very, very difficult times just a very small part of a life of astonishing service.Â

And the other thing I've noticed in the last couple of days is we're all telling our stories. And yesterday, I found myself saying to somebody in the street as we shared stories, I mean, I've at least had the honour of meeting her late Majesty, this person had never met her. But we're sharing stories. And I said, you know, it's strange, isn't it, how we need to tell our stories. It's not like she was a member of our family. Except she was, that was the point. She served the household of a nation. It wasn't for her a rule. It was an act of service to this people and to all of us. And, and I just want to remind us again and again, that that came from somewhere. It came from her profound faith in the One who said that I am among you as one who serves, that the hallmark of leadership is service and watchfulness and waiting. And it was her lived in day in day out faith in Jesus Christ, which sustained and motivated and equipped her for that lifetime of service.Â

And how inspiring last night and for me again this morning to see the baton pass to our new King Charles in the same spirit of Godly service to the people of a nation. Her Majesty the Queen died on September the eighth, which is the day the church remembers the Blessed Virgin Mary across the world across the church. And another Elizabeth, the cousin of Mary, said of her when she knew she was going to be the mother of the Lord. Blessed is she who believed that the promises made to her would be fulfilled.

I think what shot through all our tributes in this House and in another place and across our nation, is what we've seen, especially, thank you for reminding us in your speech, especially as it was only Tuesday, wasn't it? Can it be possible, it was only Tuesday that she was receiving a new prime minister, serving to the end, a life fulfilled?Â

Let me just very briefly finish with a few, very, very few a handful of her words. This is what she wrote in a book to mark her 90th birthday, reflecting on her faith in Jesus Christ. She said, I have indeed (in her life), I have indeed seen his faithfulness. Well, as you know, I always call you brothers and sisters, I'm not supposed to, Lords, dear friends, we have seen her faithfulness too and we see it now in our new king. May her late Majesty the Queen, rest in peace and rise in glory. And God save the king.

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