

*Archbishop Stephen preaches and presides at Choral Eucharist at Southwark Cathedral on the eve of the funeral of HM Queen Elizabeth II*

I will work my way round to the scriptures for the day but want to start with a verse from Psalm 46: "There is a river that makes glad the city of God."

This is where I want to start with: "There is a river that makes glad the city of God."

I don't quite know why I love this verse so much, but whenever it comes around in the daily round of reciting the psalms, I feel an inner surge of peace and an inner replenishing, as if from some underground stream of grace, assuring me that no matter the urgency and complexity of the challenges before me on the surfaces of life, there is a river.

As you came to Southwark Cathedral this morning and as you walk around London – or for that matter any major city almost anywhere in the world – you will be stepping without knowing it over hidden, subterranean rivers and streams. There are a great many in London, the direct or indirect tributaries of the upper estuary of the Thames. They were built over during the rapid expansion of London in previous centuries, many of them turned into what engineers call culverts. The most famous is probably the Fleet. You can probably guess where it runs. It is why Fleet Street gets its name. But just along from us here on the south of the Thames and under our feet as we travel around is the Effra, the Falconbrook, the Wandle and the Peck.

Some rivers, like the Brent and the Rom, are only partially underground. So you can see them in certain places and sometimes in extraordinary weather conditions these underground streams break the surface, and we see them again. We think its floods from above, but its actually the rivers underneath coming up.

In a similar way, something extraordinary is happening in our nation at the moment. Queues of people, thousands and thousands of people, are queueing along the Thames past here to Westminster Hall. As I've had to stay in London to play my small part in all that is happening this week, staying at Lambeth Palace, I have talked to quite a number and have walked on foot everywhere this week. I sang Praise My Soul the King of Heaven with three women at the very front of the queue. I ordered pizza for some in the queue, I didn't make the pizza as some may have reported, but Deliveroo need an address to deliver, not somewhere along the queue. So staying at Lambeth, I spoke to the person at the Gatehouse and was able to help. They are here, of course, to pay their respects to Her Late Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. But something else is happening as well. Something that was always here, but hidden from view, is breaking the surface: not just an outpouring of grief, but a reaffirmation of some of the things and the deep-seated values that are the best of us. What we saw in Her Late Majesty the Queen - her diligence, her devotion to duty, her warmth, her commitment to service rather than rule, her gentle good humour - are things we also want to see in ourselves and in our world.

And just as these things flowed, as if from a stream of grace, from her profound and simple daily living out of the Christian faith, so we might also dare to see that in a so-called secular society this great stream of people wanting to pay their respects are also gently and steadfastly reasserting a set of ideas, values and principles which themselves flow from the Christian vocation that in order to live life well we must love God and love our neighbour as ourselves

In our nation and in our world in recent years, yes in our church, there has been so much that has divided us. Now this great stream of people from every part of the country and also from across the world draws us together, David Beckham as well as the person from Aberdeen who caught the overnight train to join the queue in the morning. Moreover, it is striking that many of us who grieve and mourn have been a bit surprised by our response, not necessarily thinking of ourselves as much of a royalist, but now united in a common witness that is, I believe, as well as being about Her Majesty the Queen and what she gave to us, about how we want to be as a nation which is together and committed to each other.

To borrow Amos' phrase, the right balances. Hear this, you that trample on the needy, and bring to ruin the poor of the land, says the prophet Amos, and we might add, those who cover over or try to control the overflowing streams of God's grace, for as Paul writes to Timothy, There is one God, and one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human - one of us, on our side who gave himself for us.

God will not forget our misdeeds, says Amos.

To share the good news of God's grace, for this I was appointed a Herald, says Paul.

You cannot serve two masters, says Jesus in today's Gospel reading, not God and wealth.

We need to be a bit fairer and all this matters. It matters that we live in a just and fair society. It matters that the gap between rich and poor is widening. It matters that the cost-of-living crisis is hurting our poorest communities hardest. It matters that the values we long for do not exist in a vacuum, but flow from the heart of God.

It seems to me that an underground stream of decency, goodness - and maybe even an unrealised godliness - has broken the surface.

Just as some people have been surprised to discover they were a bit more of a royalist than they thought, so people are discovering an instinctive desire to pray, and are therefore not so sure that abandoning God or living without God was such a good idea after all.

My dear friends, Sisters and Brothers in Christ, let me tell you that there is a river that makes glad our hearts. A river of the water of life, bright as crystal, and flowing, we are told in the book of Revelation, from the very throne of God and from Jesus himself.

It is to these living waters we are called, a stream of refreshing and replenishing grace that flows from the heart of Jesus to my heart and to your heart and to the heart of the world, enabling us to live peaceably and with justice, to be the very best that we can be, and in so doing discover our common humanity, united across the invidious barriers of difference that we usually so love to erect, the kingdom of God, which is, of course, a kingdom without a king, for there is no temple in that city and the Lord himself is our servant, temple, light and life.

Her Majesty the Queen knew this well. And so, it seems does King Charles, who in his first public statements has already spoken so clearly about his Christian faith. Those to whom we bend the knee in the constitutional monarchy in which we live, know that they must bend the knee to God. And in so doing, despite the complicated dance and all the slightly absurd gloriously British rituals of government and hierarchy played out before us this week, we find ourselves alongside each other. Standing in the same queue. Desiring the same things. Bathing in the same stream. Seated at the same table, the banquet of heaven of which this Eucharist is a part.

AmenÂ

6 min read

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