

'I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.' (Revelation 21. 22 - 24)

Coronations do not always go to plan.

At Edward II's coronation in 1307, a section of wall behind the Abbey's high altar collapsed, killing one of the knights in attendance.

In 1626 Charles I had to cancel the procession because of the pestilence.

In 1661 at Charles II's coronation, a squabble broke out between barons over who got to keep pieces of the silk canopy that was held above the King's head.

In 1761, they lost the Sword of State. Everything ran late and by the time the archbishop came to deliver his sermon, it was drowned out by the clatter of cutlery and the tinkling of glasses as hungry peers started eating and drinking mid service.

In 1838 at Queen Victoria was told the ceremony had finished, when in fact it hadn't. She retired to St Edward's Chapel, where she was shocked to find the altar covered with sandwiches and bottles of wine – there to keep the clergy and others going in what was a very long service.

Eating and drinking during the service it appears was quite a feature in days gone by.

This was also the service where the Archbishop of Canterbury jammed the coronation ring onto the wrong finger, causing the Queen acute pain and where the aptly named Lord Rolle, nearly 90 at the time, caught his foot in his robes as he was about to pay homage, tripped and fell sideways, 'rolling' to the bottom of the steps. It was then said that rolling in this manner should become a hereditary duty for his family.

And in 1902 for the coronation of King Edward VII, the Archbishop of Canterbury put the crown on back to front.

I'm happy to report that none of these things happened yesterday. And since individual peers paying homage was dispensed with and replaced with a much more fitting invitation for everyone both in the Abbey and watching on television at home to pay homage together if they wished, the service was a good deal shorter than in the past.

I didn't take any sandwiches with me. If claret was being served anywhere in the Abbey, I wasn't offered any. And fortunately, another problem which has beset other very long services, the need for a comfort break, never arose.

Moreover, the crown was put on the right way round, the ring put on the correct finger, no bits of Westminster Abbey collapsed, and as far as I could tell no one tripped over. I even managed to hold onto all my bits of paper, not dropping anything for the camera this time.

It was a glorious, humbling, and historic occasion and I'm very blessed to have been part of it.

But what did it all mean? And how does it make sense in the diverse smorgasbord of cultures that make up a largely secular, but at the same time multi-faith 21st century Britain?

Let's start at the beginning. For me, one of the most moving bits of the service, and an innovation in this coronation service, was that the first person who spoke was a child, who said to the King, 'Your majesty, as children of the Kingdom of God we welcome you in the name of the King of Kings.' And the king replied, 'In his name and after his example I come not to be served but to serve.'

This one exchange sums up how we see, and indeed how our new king sees, kingship and leadership.

First it is about service, following the example of Jesus himself who comes as one who serves, and it is his words, the words of Jesus, that the king made his own and were the first words he spoke.

But, secondly, Jesus who is servant is also Jesus who is King, the one through whom the whole created order has its origin and in whom it finds its meaning and purpose. He is the one who has come among us in our own human flesh, who shares completely what it means to be human and who serves us. He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, yet he kneels before us and washes our feet. We, of course, here in York saw something of this lived out when the King came here to York Minster a few weeks ago to distribute the Maundy money.

In our second reading from the Book of Revelation, words that we find in the very last few pages of the Bible, St John receives a vision of the new creation, a new heaven and a new earth, and he says that he can see no temple in the city, 'for its temple is the Lord God the almighty and the Lamb' - that is Jesus. And that the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, 'for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.'

(Revelation 21. 22-23) He also says that the throne of God and of the lamb will be there, 'and his servants will worship him, they will see his face.'

(Revelation 21. 27).

So, there is one other detail about the coronation service that I found compelling.

If most of us had been planning the choreography of such a service, we would probably have placed the thrones facing the people that the King is called to serve, if for no other reason than that it made one of the climaxes of the service visible to as many people as possible. However, you will have noticed that the thrones were facing east, towards the altar of God and therefore towards God's throne.

This simple but profound arrangement of the furniture says something very important about earthly kingship and indeed all earthly leadership. It finds its source, origin, and authority elsewhere. If it is to be effective, it must follow the example of the servant King, the one who is the servant leader. And for our new King, even at the moment he was crowned and the moment he was enthroned, he does this facing the altar of God and therefore powerfully reminded that even though he is the one to whom we bend the knee as our Head of State, he too, like all of us, must bend the knee to God. Hence it is as our first reading from the Book of Proverbs declared,

'By me kings reign,

and rulers decree what is just;

by me rulers rule,

and nobles, all who govern rightly.' (Proverbs 8. 16)

The service yesterday recognised this. That it is God's justice and God's righteousness that our rulers are called to uphold, and that we are called

to strive for in this world.

As I took my place in the Abbey yesterday and played a small part in the service, I was praying for our King, but also for our nation as a new era begins. Being a subject is not a concept that sits easily with us today. But with such an emphasis on service I believe we can faithfully reimagine ourselves as loyal citizens; loyal citizens, with responsibilities to each other within that web of responsibilities that is held together by the Crown, and whose powers and responsibilities are worked out through Parliament and government, so that all those who lead, who bear responsibility and carry influence, may have a servant heart and work together for the common good of the diverse communities we serve. Such a rich diversity of people, ideas and experience makes our nation stronger. Honouring that diversity is a vital part of the freedoms King Charles promised yesterday to uphold, and surely that must also include the right to disagree and the right to peaceful protest.

So, nothing went wrong. Except maybe we fail to reflect on what this could mean for us as we live together in our sometimes fragmented nation and faithfully exercise our agency and responsibility to follow in the way of Christ's servant leadership and make a difference in the world. For Christ is our light and our life, and it is to his throne of grace that we must turn. Amen.

[Watch the full service at York Minster here.](#)

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