

## ***Family Traits – A Sermon for Coronation Weekend (Sunday 7 May 2023)***

### **John 14: 1-14 (by Rev Phil Wootton)**

I remember when I was young there were two things during the summer that would get my father depressed. The first was when the weather threatened to interfere with his cricket match, and the second was when the lawn needed mowing. You could sense for days in advance his eye on the grass, daring it to grow any faster, and then, finally unable to bear it any longer, with bad grace, the mower would come forth. Coming back from holiday last week to find my grass well above ankle-height, I felt my heart sink and my enthusiasm dissipate. It was then I realised I am turning into my father, inheriting an unwanted family trait. Many of you will have felt something similar, perhaps catching yourself repeating a phrase, or using a tone of voice, that particularly grated when you were young but now coming out of your own mouth. Like father, like son; like mother, like daughter. We all have our family traits!

Jesus speaks of such family traits between himself and his Father. Unlike ours (which we only notice when they're negative ones) his are all positive. When the apostle Philip says his life would be fulfilled if he saw the Father, but Jesus replies, 'If you have seen me, you have seen the Father.' There is nothing more. 'The words I say are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father living in me, who is doing his work.' You can't put a sheet of paper between Father and Son. Jesus is the human face of God. We know God is love: to understand what that means, we need to hear Jesus saying, 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.' We know God is just: we understand it as we hear Jesus saying (for example), 'Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone.' We know God is merciful: we understand it as we hear Jesus praying, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.' The family traits are unmistakable. Like Father, like Son, for ever.

We who follow are called to develop the same family traits, to develop on earth the likeness of the Son, who will present us to the Father in the world to come.

This weekend all our thoughts have been on the coronation of King Charles III, and I have been wondering how this message applies in this context. Certainly, lots of people have been speculating about how far the new king's reign will be a continuance with, or diverge from, that of Queen Elizabeth II. We can be sure there will be plenty that is like mother, like son – the sense of duty and calling, of service and responsibility. My own suspicion is that the monarchy will continue to do what it's been remarkably good at – appearing to remain unchanging whilst adapting significantly to the times.

I wonder if we can go back further. How far do the family traits of monarchy get passed down over the years, and the centuries? Of course, there are plenty of bad family traits of past kings and royal families that we hope are long lost in the mist of time. But the coronation service, with its origins in Anglo-Saxon times, expresses a vision for Christian monarchy that is passed down through the centuries.

Indeed, it goes back further. Echoes of the ceremonies for anointing Biblical kings like Saul, David and Solomon are still heard in today's. We can scarcely imagine a coronation without Handel's great anthem, *Zadok the Priest*, which comes from 1 Kings 1: 38-40. Interestingly, this recounts not an orderly succession, but a palace coup which made Solomon king before his more powerful half-brother Adonijah had time to act. The Old Testament presents two views on kingship: an idealised one, especially in the Psalms where the kings praises are proclaimed in song and verse; and a prophetic one, where royal short-comings are brought to light (like the prophet Nathan's calling out of King David for his adultery – 'you are that man;' or Ezekiel and Jeremiah denouncing kings as false shepherds who lead their sheep astray.)

The reality of kingship, as any other walk of life, is a mixed bag. All are human, after all. All are made gloriously in the image of God, and all have tragically fallen and marred that image. It's just that the higher the profile, the more public the fall. The question is always, whose family traits are going to be seen in each of us?

Jesus called his followers together and said to them, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave. Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve, and to give up his life as a ransom for many.' (Matthew 20: 25-28)

It's a vision of leadership that confounds all other models offered in this world – be it in politics or business or anywhere else – and yet is particularly apposite for a constitutional monarch, who has no power but only influence and example. It's a vision of leadership Jesus fulfilled completely. All who seek to follow (kings or commoners alike) are called to practise the family traits, and pray others may see the true family likeness in us.