



THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND



The word majesty – if I were to ask you what it means, what would you say?

I know it's hard because the brain understands words and language in context or experientially. I'm not sure quite how to define this word but I know what it means because I know how to use it properly.

And we know how to use the word majesty.

I looked it up last night anyway.

According to the Cambridge dictionary it is something or someone that causes admiration and respect for its power and/or beauty. It is something or someone that carries great dignity or authority.

A lion roaring in all its strength and freedom has a kind of majesty.

An old oak that has stood for hundreds of years, providing shelter and witness to history – we might well speak of it as a majestic oak.

And we invest this word, majesty, in our ruling family don't we. Or its head – King Charles. His Majesty.

Admiration, respect, power, beauty.

But where does his majesty come from? If Charles is invested with such majesty, where does it come from?

Well, the service yesterday was very clear wasn't it.

It comes from the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, majesty comes from God. The one who made heaven and earth. Only God can invest majesty in human beings – and the service was there to remind us of that. It was there at every turn, the oaths, the anointing, the coronation itself, the communion, the stripping back to a simple robe, the sermon and the readings. Everywhere you turned you saw, you heard, you were reminded that Charles' majesty is rooted in and dependent upon the majesty of God.

We have a real sense of God's majesty in these two readings we have heard – chosen for this weekend.

In Isaiah:

How can we even conceive of something so mighty as God?
He has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
He weighs the mountains in scales,
The nations are like a drop from a bucket, - gosh I wish I could write like this.

Awe and majesty.

Isaiah reminds us of Job who dares tentatively to challenge the God who seems to have caused him such anguish. And God replies in Job 38: "Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation?

God, our God, is beyond compare, beyond understanding, beyond questioning – an absolute power, an absolute authority. Majesty as defined by the Cambridge dictionary. Power, respect, awe-inspiring.

But the other side of God's majesty comes in a stable: comes to wash the feet of the least among us, comes to eat with sinners, comes to heal the sick, comes to die on a cross. Comes to serve. God is meekness and majesty.

This is our God.

Look at the second reading. There is an argument about who is the greatest and Jesus replies the greatest among you must become as the youngest. A paradox – truth inherent in a real contradiction. The weakest can't be the strongest, and yet they are, strongest; the greatest can't be the least, yet it is so. Can a King really be a servant. A paradox.

Power and status turned on its head, or rather redefined completely. IN another place Jesus will say children are the closest to the kingdom of God – in his time, children, like women and slaves were the bottom of a very big pile. To say that those who by the world's measure are at the bottom, are by God's measure, at the top, Meekness and majesty. This is our God.

For me there were two very moving parts of the ceremony and two very troubling parts –

At the beginning, in a new addition to the ceremony, a child stood before Charles and said children of the Kingdom of heaven welcome you. And Charles replied, like Christ, I come not to be served but to serve. Wonderful.

Secondly, there was the symbolic stripping back of status and privilege when Charles was divested of his robes for the anointing. So much was done to Charles during that service – did you notice. From the moment he arrived til the moment he left, he was shown where to go and when, what to pick up and what to put down. - his robes meant that sometimes he was being almost manhandled by those two bishops - they were manoeuvring him around no doubt to help him, but it felt symbolically, quite Christ-like as well, or a bit like Peter who would be led where he might not want to go. And then, as it said in one of the newspapers this morning, he put the regalia and the power and privilege of the Crown imprisoned him again.

And for the troubling parts – yes, the act of homage. The oath. Not the thing itself.

Why? Because if stats are to be believed, many people who made that homage both inside the abbey and in the wider country, don't believe in God. Many would like to see organised religion gone completely and our faith privatised. I might be wrong, and a service such as this might move many to reconsider the place of Christianity, I hope so. If not, that homage was truly a case for some of style over substance.

Secondly, After the service a commentator asked a question which I thought was both profound and troubling – she said, speaking briefly about the protestant Christian ceremony itself, 'I don't know what it all meant but it must have meant something'. That's a moving thing to say, a sense of people reaching after meaning in the context of faith, but it was also troubling because she moved on so quickly to focus on what she could understand – the power and pageantry of the armed forces, the gold carriage, the patriotism of the day, the crowds, even the British weather. Which will we recall? The profound references to service and to humility or the pomp and the pageantry. Which will define the day, which will define our faith?

Service, unity, love, compassion, inclusion, diversity. All the things displayed in the service yesterday – were they real, for many they were, or were they for some, rhetorical devices to put at the service of a system of government that still excludes, still marginalises, still privileges some human beings over others,

that still has the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate, both imprisoned. By our fruits we are known.

I say none of this to be disparaging.

I am genuinely asking myself the question - and you answer for yourself, not for me.

But my question then is this – What is real – what is rhetorical in the way we practise our faith? IN what we saw yesterday?

I actually admire Charles very much in some ways, he says some good things and holds to some good values, including his work for the environment, but what of the other powers - the monarchy itself, the government, the establishment, the media - was there real meekness and majesty on display yesterday or was meekness used as a cloak, a rhetorical device, to make human love of our own power and privilege and majesty more palatable. I don't know the answer. But I know the poor man is still at the gate, and still waiting.

IN the words of Blake, that first hymn we sang today, we still wait for Jerusalem to be built here.

Meekness and majesty- meekness and majesty

This is our God.