Of the funeral sermons I have written, this is at once the easiest and the hardest. It is the hardest because, of course, this is not really a funeral sermon but a sermon written in the context of national mourning- and, secondly, because we know so much about the Queen and so little. We have seen her and referred to her throughout the whole of our lives and yet, at the same moment, we know so little about her thoughts and ideas, her likes and dislikes, who she was. We might guess, but we don’t know, which of her Prime Ministers she liked best or whether she actually was for Leave or Remain. Which is what made any hint of a leak of a personal opinion so very dangerous to the Crown, and any hint of a personal opinion so delightful. She tended to leave all of that to her husband…

It is the hardest sermon because we have seen the Queen through a mirror dimly and filled in the detail for ourselves: but it is the easiest for this reason- the stories we have recently been told about the Queen and the way she lived and what she believed in go together, hand in hand.

We have caught glimpses of the Queen in the stories of personal encounters and personal acts told so beautifully by so many people since her death, as people have taken their most precious memories out of the pocket nearest to their heart and unwrapped them and held them up to the light, glowing and vibrant and true.

Some of them have been almost unbearably tender, like Dr David Nott, the trauma surgeon invited to lunch at the Palace after he returned from working in Syria, who found it impossible to speak when the Queen came over to him, the whole Palace thing unbearable and jarring and overwhelming, and the Queen sensing it and asking him to feed biscuits to the corgis knee to knee with the Queen.

Others are amusing, like this one Archbishop Stephen Cottrell heard in the House of Lords: I won’t do the accent…

Her Late Majesty the Queen loved horses, horse racing in particular, and dogs. This is well known. She was, however, no great lover of team sports, even though she saw a good many. After all, it was she who handed the Jules Rimet Trophy to Bobby Moore in 1966. After what I imagined must have been a particularly tedious cup final the Chairman of the FA, or some such sporty person, turned to her and asked whether she thought anyone had played well. She paused. Timing is everything with comedy. Yes, she replied, the Band of the Scots Guards.

There are so very many stories to tell, stories which reveal something of the Queen’s kindness and honour, and generosity and love- and those stories give us ample evidence of the why as well, why she was like this, what motivated her and drove her.

We have such clear evidence of the depth and importance of her faith. We don’t just know that she went to Church but, because of her words, especially in her Christmas broadcasts since 2000, we know how much strength and direction she took from her living faith, how deeply she understood her position as a calling from God.

It is very easy to see her as a servant leader in the model of Jesus. Part of that is political calculation, I am sure, but there is more to it than that. She followed Jesus, who laid aside his majesty and came to earth and lived among us and died for us and then rose again in glory. He voluntarily set aside his power and became human. Similarly, as a disciple of Christ, Queen Elizabeth used her power and her influence and her impossible glamour as a way of blessing others in ways we know about and in very many ways we do not. Being Queen was not about her- it was all about us, for us, to raise us up, to gift us something precious, to bless us. The glow of monarchy was not meant to illuminate her but to illuminate us. It was not a gift to her but a gift to and for us.

Not that I’m saying that it was not somewhat cushy being the Queen in lots of ways, but it is to say that the Queen was in it for us and not primarily for what she could get out of it.

This would be an easy funeral sermon to write because we have so many images of the Queen which convey truth. Moments, stories, encounters are a superb way into the why of someone’s life.

Our Gospel reading today is one such moment in the life of Jesus. His Nazareth Manifesto is a frame through which we can see all of his life and ministry- you can almost sit there with it by your side while you read the rest of the Gospel ticking it off- “Release to the captive- tick… sight to the blind- tick…” The reading not only presents the what but also gives us the why, the intent, the overview.

A good funeral should not only call to mind moments of a person’s life but the why as well, snapshots conveying truth which capture and unfurl the essence of someone’s values and beliefs, their why.

You might all, will all, have your own moment which reveals the Queen’s why and it will be great to keep hearing about them.

For me, it comes back to Covid, and the sense of utter integrity she showed which shone even brighter in the context of other leaders who sought to make the rules but not keep them.

When the Queen said “As dark as death can be- particularly for those suffering with grief- light and life are greater” you knew that she spoke from experience and that she believed it and that helped other people believe it a little bit too. And when the Queen sat in the choir of St George’s Chapel utterly alone at the funeral of her husband, who she had known for over 80 years and been married to for over 70- you saw something of the best of us and our response to Covid- integrity and grief and dignity and loss and leadership and service- all wrapped up in one small, determined, ageing, glorious body.

That one image, that one decision, that one example, that one gift to us all, her people, justifies all of the fuss and organisation and effort of these 10 days, if justification is needed. She stood with us then: we honour her now.

Let me conclude. The Queen had a long and extraordinary life. That might not be true for us.

But she knew that she was a servant of the God who created her and loved her. So do we. She found meaning and strength in the life of Jesus. So do we. She was inspired by the Holy Spirit. So are we.

And she used the life she had to be a witness to God’s love and to make the world around her better. We can do that too.

May she rest in peace and rise with the saints in glory. Amen.