

The Right Honourable David Johnston
Speech on the Occasion of the Regina Prayer Breakfast
Regina, SK - Tuesday, April 19, 2019

Ladies and gentlemen
Mesdames et messieurs,

Good morning! It is wonderful to be here with all of you.

Merci de l'invitation à être parmi vous pour ce petit déjeuner de prière.

I would like to address three interrelated topics today – faith, service and love – la foi, le service et l'amour – and I will do so in the context of my own faith as well as of my role as the former representative of our head of state, Queen Elizabeth II, who also serves as defender of the faith.

In my own case, the Christian faith has been my rock. I grew up in Northern Ontario in the Anglican tradition. While at university in Boston, I took the short course at the Episcopal Theological College to become a lay reader.

Among other things, it opened a whole new window in my life because for several summers I filled in Sundays for the Anglican ministers serving the First Nations reserves and other rural parishes near my hometown of Sault Ste. Marie. It was my first in-depth encounter with First Nations people both on- and off-reserve.

Throughout her 67 years as the longest-reigning British monarch of all time, Her Majesty has stood for stability, steadfastness, and stewardship. I am much inspired by her life of service.

La vie et la foi constante de Sa Majesté la Reine est une source d'inspiration pour moi. Je vais donc vous parler de ma foi et mes croyances en m'appuyant sur son témoignage.

Today I am drawing from a book about her faith that was published in honour of her 90th birthday, entitled *The Servant Queen - and the King she serves*.

1. Let me begin with faith.

The Queen's public demonstration of trust in faith began early in her life.

La foi de Sa Majesté la Reine s'est manifestée tôt dans sa vie.

Here is the story.

In the foreword The Queen wrote to this little book, she referred to a poem quoted by her father George VI in his Christmas broadcast in 1939. Remember the time – Europe again found itself at war. The invasion of Britain was an imminent peril. The King, who had to work to overcome

a debilitating stammer, had been thrust onto the Throne only two years earlier, surprised and unprepared after the abdication of Edward VIII.

Here is the poem which he read without a stammer:

*I said to the man who stood at the Gate of the Year,
Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown.
And he replied, "Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the hand of God,
That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way.*

What is less known – and a less known way – is who gave that poem to King George. It was the future Queen, Princess Elizabeth, his 13-year-old daughter. Typical of Her Majesty's lifelong tendency to understate and depersonalize, that information is not contained in her foreword. It is only disclosed later in the book by others.

The Queen's faith is robustly rooted and ever-present. In her annual Christmas broadcasts, she always refers to Jesus Christ and His teachings.

In 1984, she said: "For me, the life of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace whose birth we celebrate today, is an inspiration and an anchor in my life. A role-model of reconciliation and forgiveness, He stretched out his hands in love, acceptance and healing. Christ's example has taught me to seek respect and value all people of whatever faith or none."

The Queen's strong Christian faith does not lead her to exclude other faiths or minorities but rather to embrace them, to accord them the same respect and dignity she does to those who share her beliefs. This is an important lesson as we consider the ecumenical nature of this Prayer Breakfast which brings us all together – so inclusively – this morning.

Former Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks of the United Kingdom recently said, "We do not always appreciate the role The Queen has played in one of the most significant changes in the past sixty years: the transformation of Britain into a multi-ethnic, multi-faith society. No one does interfaith better than the Royal family, and it starts with The Queen herself".

"Her presence and her family role as the human face of national identity is one of the great unifying forces in Britain, a unity we need all the more, the more diverse religiously and culturally we become".

Rabbi Sacks' observations apply equally well to Canada.

2. Let me turn to service.

La Reine voit le service comme un engagement pour la vie.

In her 21st birthday address delivered five years before her own accession to the Throne, Her Majesty anticipated her lifetime of service when she said:

“I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong.”

And then reaching out for the compass for that life, she added: “God help me to make my vow, and God bless all of you who are willing to share in it”.

Sixty-one years later, in her 2008 Christmas broadcast, she said: “I hope that, like me, you will be comforted by the example of Jesus of Nazareth who, often in circumstances of great adversity, managed to live an outgoing, unselfish, and sacrificial life.

He makes clear that genuine human happiness and satisfaction lie more in giving than receiving, more in serving than in being served.

We can surely be grateful that, two thousand years after the birth of Jesus, so many of us are able to draw inspiration from His life and message, and to find in Him a source of strength and courage.”

What is the secret of The Queen’s remarkable consistency of service?

In 2002 she said: “I know just how much I rely on my faith to guide me through the good times and the bad. Each day is a new beginning. I know that the only way to live my life is to try to do what is right, to take the long view, to give of my best in all that the day brings, and to put my trust in God ... I draw strength from the message of hope in the Christian gospel.”

As we reflect on The Queen’s 93 years of life and 67 years on the Throne, again and again, we see the theme of steadfast service persists.

3. Let me turn to love

My wife often says, “Service is love made real”. I speak of that love which St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13: “Faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.”

It is interesting to me – but not surprising – that love, especially the commandment to “love thy neighbor,” is at the core not only of Christian religion but of so many other great faiths around the world.

L’amour est une valeur universelle et à la base de toutes les autres.

In another Christmas message, The Queen showed her understanding of the practicality of this commandment. She said: “Many will have been inspired by Jesus’ simple but powerful teaching: love God and love thy neighbour as thyself – in other words, treat others as you would like them to treat you. His great emphasis was to give spirituality a practical purpose.”

And which parable of Jesus does she most often quote?

It is the story of the good Samaritan, which tells of a Hebrew man beaten by robbers and left wounded by the roadside. He was bypassed by his well-placed kinsmen, first a priest and then a

Levite. Then along came the Samaritan, who was from a different tribe – not a friend or kin – who took him up and restored him as a simple act of compassion.

For Her Majesty, another of the essential guideposts of love is forgiveness.

In her 2013 Christmas broadcast, she said: “Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves – from our recklessness or our greed. God sent into the world a unique person – neither a philosopher nor a general (important though they are) – but a Saviour with the power to forgive.”

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships, and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God’s love.”

For me, perhaps the most powerful of her lessons is the one from her 1975 Christmas message, which speaks of this fundamental truth of love and its impact throughout our society.

She said: “Christ’s simple message of love has been turning the world upside down ever since [His birth]. He showed that what people are and what they do does matter and does make all the difference.

He commanded us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves but what exactly is meant by ‘loving ourselves’? I believe it means trying to make the most of the abilities we have been given. It means caring for our talents. It is a matter of making the best of ourselves, not just doing the best for ourselves.”

I want to end this brief journey through the The Queen’s inspiring dedication to faith, service, and love by appraising the impact of her observations and her life.

The title of my installation address delivered eight years ago when I began this job was “A smart and caring nation – a call to service.” This was about the good society, about calling on our better angels. And so much of what I have tried to do since has been influenced by Christian faith as illuminated by The Queen’s messages. So let me end with a final quote from her 1975 Christmas message where she spoke of the impact and the legacy of love.

Laissez-moi terminer mon témoignage sur la foi, le service et l’amour en citant la Reine.

“We are all different, but each of us has his own best to offer. The responsibility for the way we live life with all its challenges, sadness, and joy is ours alone. If we do this well, it will also be good for our neighbours. If you throw a stone into a pool, the ripples go on spreading outwards.

A big stone can cause waves, but even the smallest pebble changes the whole pattern of the water. Our daily actions are like those ripples, each one makes a difference, even the smallest.

It does matter therefore what each individual does each day. Kindness, sympathy, resolution, and courteous behaviour are infectious. Acts of courage and self-sacrifice, like those of the

people who refuse to be terrorized by kidnappers or hijackers, or who defuse bombs, are an inspiration to others.

And the combined effect can be enormous. If enough grains of sand are dropped into one side of a pair of scales they will, in the end, tip it against a lump of lead.

We may feel powerless alone but the joint efforts of individuals can defeat the evils of our time. Together they can create a stable, free, and considerate society.”

My final words are a personal story of another Prayer Breakfast, which took place about 30 years ago, in Montréal, when Mother Teresa came to town.

One of our neighbours, moved by her work with the poor in Calcutta, asked Mother Teresa how she could help. She replied: “Just look around you. In your own neighbourhood there is a family who needs your care and love.”

Shortly afterward, I read a criticism of Mother Teresa’s work. Her shelter in Calcutta gave succour to perhaps 200 people in a city where millions lived in abject poverty. Her work was described as one small drop in an ocean.

A few weeks later, I realized the shortcomings of this criticism. It was looking at her work from the point of view of physics, rather than chemistry.

I came to this realization in an unusual way. At that time, my children were aged 2 to 9, and they were unsatisfied with the entertainment I was providing at their birthday parties. They would ask me, “Why can’t you do a magic show like Dean MacFarlane instead of telling us ghost stories that no one believes?”

In those days, Andy MacFarlane was the Dean of Journalism at the University of Western Ontario, where I was the Dean of Law. Being quite competitive, I attended the next birthday party at the MacFarlane home, where Andy was dressed as a magician, with a long cape and flowing sleeves. He was performing a magic trick, turning water into wine. He took a glass of clear water, raised it in the air, and uttered that magic phrase, “Abracadabra!” He then swept the glass into his sleeve while whirling 360 degrees, surreptitiously adding a few drops of red vegetable dye into the glass, and emerged with a glass of a lovely rose-hued liquid.

At that moment, I realized that the work Mother Teresa was doing was changing the culture of Calcutta, and indeed that of the world. It was the transformation of the water – not the addition to it – that was improving the lives of so many families.

Thank you.