

“Well done, good and faithful servant”

“Well done, good and faithful servant”. When Prince Philip went into hospital recently, all sorts of precious memories came to my mind. Prince Philip has most frequently been seen, walking three steps behind Her Majesty, chatting to those who have principally come to see the Queen. He has greeted the crowds with grace, good humour, and respect. He has been such a faithful “hanger on”. I am reminded of those beautiful words (in Ruth chapter 1) that Ruth says to her mother-in-law Naomi: “Where you go, I will go; your people shall be my people; your God shall be my God”. Such faithfulness! Although Naomi wanted to release her widowed daughter-in-law from any obligations of caring for her in old age, Ruth pledged complete loyalty. In the Middle Ages, the Hebrew word *emuna* is often translated as ‘faith’ – but that makes it sound very religious. Originally, the word was translated as ‘reliability’, or ‘loyalty’. How precious those virtues are! When I was watching recently a documentary on the last days of President Trump, I was staggered (and a little bit frightened) to see how much loyalty his supporters awarded the President – and how little he reciprocated. Leadership needs loyalty to function; leaders conversely owe their followers loyalty and reliability. That is what Prince Philip has embodied so well.

I also feel an association as my mother was involved with the Duke of Edinburgh’s Award Scheme in the early days in Hertfordshire, acting as a county coordinator. I grew up seeing the value at first hand of promoting the virtues of developing skills, volunteering and (what we would now call) pushing the boundaries. The D of E scheme was especially appropriate for those who did not feel drawn to Scouts or Guides – perhaps those who were more comfortable alone, or those who did not have a close supportive network. So, when I saw the Prince presenting Gold awards, I saw his ability to draw people together, to build enthusiasm, and to leave people more confident in themselves and in what they can offer to others.

I was privileged to be invited to lunch in the Guildhall on Maundy Thursday 2006, after the Queen had presented the Maundy Money in Guildford Cathedral. I was seated at the same table as Prince Philip. However the Guildhall was so crowded, and the table was so large, I could barely hear any of the conversation that was happening at our table. But I saw him take delight in those sitting close by – people, presumably, that he had never met before. The conversation never flagged; there was much laughter.

At the end of the Parable of the Talents (Matthew chapter 25), the ruler greets two of the servants who have been put their talents to use with “Well done, good and faithful servant”. The verse uses the Greek word *piste* which, as above, can be misheard as referring to a religious attitude. Rather the ruler is commending loyalty, trust, being active in service, taking risks in accordance with the ruler’s hopes. All that is what has been seen over many years in the public life of Prince Philip.

Robert Cotton, 9th April 2021