

The Transformed Church The Feast of Ss Simon and Jude

This address is the final one in a series which has been preached here as we reflect on the possibilities for re-ordering of this Cathedral Church, in the broadest understanding of what “re-ordering” is all about and the theological, spiritual and liturgical imperatives behind it.

This address is being preached on the feast day of two of the lesser known apostles, those who made up the Twelve. We have Simon, who was called “The Zealot” – a member of a nationalist resistance movement opposed to Roman occupation. Brother Tristram, in “Exciting Holiness”, asked the question if he gave up this political activity when he became a disciple or whether this was a way of life he embraced after the resurrection as a particular response to God’s call to build the Kingdom. Jude always suffered from having a name similar to that of Judas, the Betrayer, and so, when saints were regularly invoked for their prayers, he would be left out – ending up as the Patron Saint of Lost Causes. You might think not the most suitable of Saints to invoke as we reflect on our future! The Scriptures appointed for today, however, are Scriptures that inspire us with Gospel confidence as we look to the future:

The Prophet Isaiah spoke of the Lord “laying in Zion a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation”. The writer of the letter to the Ephesians speaks of “Jesus Christ himself as the cornerstone”, in whom the “whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord - - - a dwelling place for God”. This structure, our Gospel tells us, is one rooted and grounded in love – the love we see shown forth supremely in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. A transformed Church – will be a Church that strives to be faithful to this vision in every possible area of its life. Jesus Christ is our sure foundation and that foundation is known, experienced and lived in agape – the self-giving love of God.

Richard Giles, the author of the book “Re-Pitching the Tent”, which inspired this series of sermons, and which was reflected on by small groups here at the Cathedral, suggested that we ask ourselves today: “In the light of our exploration over the last few weeks, what is our dream for our worship space? How can it be re-arranged to speak more clearly of the glory of God, of our life together and of our concern for those outside?”

Our reflections over the last weeks have indeed led us to think more deeply about how this building might be re-ordered – what do we want this building to say about the Gospel, as this new century gets under way? And buildings do speak very loudly – our churches can be vital tools in communicating the Gospel; they can also be major hindrances with their locked doors, blocked sight-lines and liturgies that do not always connect the world outside to the God to whom we are offering our worship. Our doors are open more than most, our liturgy connects more and more people to the divine but we still have far to go before we are a truly transformed

Church witnessing to the Gospel of transformation, of change – in the lives of individuals, of communities and institutions at every level. And it has to be much more than just about the “re-ordering of our worship space” – as vital as that is.

The Dean began this series by reflecting on the conflict / balance between tent and temple. A tent is a sign of people on the move – and we always need to be on the move but never losing contact with our base – “the precious cornerstone, the firm foundation”. A temple can become a sign of a people who have stopped moving and are enjoying being settled and defensive. Often buildings and the care of them can seem to be a distraction from living and proclaiming the Gospel message. She quoted John Henry Newman who wrote of both the irrelevance and the necessity of church buildings. He also wrote of the absolute necessity of change – not change for change’s sake but change as an element of growth; there can be no growth without change. We are a people on the move – firmly rooted in the cornerstone but ever moving forward, having visions, taking risks – not the usual attitude of the temple dweller, who prefers to dwell in the security of the past rather than the challenge of the present and the call of the future.

Canon Wilson spoke of the Cathedral as “the Church for all”, “the gathering place for all around us” – a reality that challenges us all to change, rooted again on our firm foundation, Jesus Christ.. He asked if we could become much more than a Sunday drive-in, city- centre church and, instead connect with the exciting and challenging regeneration of this Cathedral in the middle of Leicester.

Canon Foster spoke of the importance of journeying, the journeying of faith being reflected in our building – how does this building and its immediate environs speak of the spiritual journey – both to us who may be described as being on the “inside” but probably, more importantly, to that vastly great number of people on the outside? Archbishop William Temple famously said that Church was the one organisation that existed for the well-being of those who were not its members – how is this perspective reflected in our plans for the future? What can we offer to the wider world? The Gospel, the Cornerstone, yes, of course, but what, in particular, from this city of diverse faiths and cultures – how can we speak of Gospel peace, Gospel understanding, Gospel healing and reconciliation? How might we continue to use our buildings and environs to expand our engagement with issues such as these, as we seek to be faithful to the Cathedral Vision we worked so hard to formulate – outreaching, quality filled, welcoming, radical, prayerful, inclusive, confidence building and vital to the life of the City and County – and maybe even beyond.

We have reflected on the Cathedral as a place of hospitality and learning - both linked to the idea of us responding to people who are on pilgrimages of life, pilgrimages of faith, pilgrimages of discovery.

Cathedrals gain their very name from the Latin for “Chair” – the Cathedral has a unique and particular relation to the ministry of the Bishop – the focal point of unity

in the diocese, the teacher, the prophet, the pastor. The ministry of the Bishop affirms the importance of both the local and the general. At a licensing he gives the new priest her charge – the pastoral care of each person “which is both mine and yours” – the Bishop also speaks out on the wider stage. As we are transformed, this needs, increasingly, to become a vital part of our vision and mission.

We have reflected long and hard on these things; we have identified strengths and weaknesses, good practice as well as things that are not so good. We are now called, as a people, transformed in Jesus Christ our Cornerstone, to go forward with boldness, to take risks for the kingdom, so that we can be vital and alive, both as a Community on the move and a sacred space where adoration, affirmation, challenge and transformation, for the sake of the Kingdom, can regularly be the order of the day and the hallmark by which Leicester Cathedral is known, both within the Church and in wider society.

Canon Barry Naylor