

Haggai 1:13 – 2: 9; 1 Corinthians 3: 10 – 17

Towards the end of the Covid lockdown we were fortunate enough to be able to build a new greenhouse. A friend of ours, a good builder agreed to come and lay the foundations, which he duly did. When the concrete had set, he came back to inspect his work “hmm” he said with a bit of a frown “well it’s er... a bit out I’m afraid “(you can imagine we were now readying ourselves for bad news) ... “yes, by 1 millimetre” much laughter. The construction gang later declared it to be the best base they’d ever encountered!

There’s quite a bit of ‘building’ metaphor going on in tonight’s readings. Much of it about temples: or the Temple in Jerusalem to be exact. Fascinating though the history of the Temple is, I don’t wish to dwell too much on its phases of building and destruction, nor on its rise and fall being frequently linked to level of the peace, or warfare raging around the Jewish Nation: even though sadly today the site of temple in Jerusalem is still a cause of great conflict between communities.

I would like to talk however about how the nature of foundations enables the growth of a strong and lasting structure. Firm foundations make for good buildings, but it’s not really the buildings which take centre stage here, for buildings themselves only ever reflect the life that surrounds and inspires them.

Haggai encourages the Jews returned from exile to complete the new temple, which they had begun with enthusiasm when they first returned, but seemed to have abandoned again in favour of other more lucrative projects. Ceasing to rebuild the temple is a sign of their forgetfulness of God’s saving role in their lives. Once freedom is achieved God has been put out of mind. Haggai admonishes the people, but also speaks the encouraging words that God declares he is with them. It is not the gold and silver with which they adorn it that will make the place greater than before, but the promised indwelling of the Spirit and peace of God.

That promise links with Paul’s words from 1 Corinthians the building metaphor here is of Paul, the wise builder who has laid foundations, for others, but they are already underpinned by the only credible foundation, Jesus Christ. He tells us that the materials we use to build on those foundations will vary, but it is the quality and faithfulness of us as builders, which will determine how successfully we can build the Word of Christ in the world. Paul goes on to reassure the Corinthians and by way of that letter, reassures us all, that **we** are God’s temple. It is not the physical act of building, but the fact that our foundations are built on the faith in Christ’s. That faith of his followers allows the spirit and peace of God to indwell in their hearts, that is how God’s temple is created.

“We are God’s temple,” easy words to understand **and “my body is a temple (1 Cor 6: 19)** ...is a verse often hi-jacked by health and fitness gurus I’ve noticed, who probably don’t know its origin. Still, for those of us like me, whose temple might be more like the one you’d see on an archaeological tour, **what does it really mean for us, our bodies to be God’s temple?**

It means that we have to build our lives and our faith on the firm foundations of Christ. Tonight I'd like to say a little about your foundations, here in St Alkmund's and in and around the communities in which you live.

Just to sit and look around you for a moment

Firstly, look at this beautiful building. The light, the colour, the Easter candle, the things that might mean something to you personally. It is a glorious and often uplifting place to be and it surrounds us tonight with a sense of holiness, of God's presence and of his love for us. No one says we shouldn't have buildings of worship that reflect, even through the mist of human eyes, something of God's glory. The beauty here is inspirational, but this is also a building that draws people from outside. It is not an exclusive sanctuary, though sanctuary it can be, but an inclusive and welcoming place that embraces the town in which it dwells. The spirit of the Lord is here, but that spirit is also able to radiate from here into the landscapes around it.

Secondly, look at the people who are here: perhaps visitors, friends, neighbours, family, ... think about the ones who come at different times. You are a community with foundations that can continue be built upon and can still draw others towards the love of God. Think, as you often do I know, about those who don't come, or can't come. ... but look at the things you've established and the things you are still doing: the ecumenical services, the Civic Services, the Food bank, Time Together, Hospital and Care Home Chaplaincy, work with schools: so many more, which I know you will be acknowledging next week and so

Thirdly look at the person who has most recently built some very firm foundations to allow many of us to be more confident in building our faith. Sometimes we're privileged to meet those who can establish and reinforce our foundations and who in the same way that St Paul does, can remind us of the great joy and wholeness that comes from our faith in Christ. There is depth and promise in that joy.

Judy Hunt in recent years has provided those foundations for many of you, as she has done for me. I'm just visiting this evening and I don't want to pre-empt your own words, for your own Rector, of which there will be many next week I'm sure, But I do give thanks for Judy , for the foundations she has provided and the building she has done (some of it literally here of course) and for the strength of this community which continues to strive to become God's Temple, as above all, it provides a place for God's Holy Spirit to indwell.

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No doubt the everyday demands will continue for Judy and for all of you: the literal upkeep of the building, the embedding of the sound system, the pastoral care, and all those things for which Judy will be thanked next week: things of which you are all part. However, as you move into a week of change, of endings and beginnings, may this place and your work be continually underpinned by foundations of faith in Christ and by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, wherever his temple may be. May God bless you all. **Amen**