

Sermon for 18th July 2021 (Seventh Sunday after Trinity)

Jer. 7. 1-7; Ps. 132; 1 Cor. 3. 9-17

May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

“You are God’s building.” On this day on which we celebrate the consecration of our parish church of St Peter’s, it is good that we should be reminded that the “Church” to which we belong is not first and foremost a building, but is rather the assembly throughout the world of all those Christian men, women and children who have been baptised as members of the body of Christ. Just like synagogues and the temple at Jerusalem, parish churches, cathedrals, chapels are built to the glory of God as convenient places where congregations can gather in shelter to carry out their worship firstly, but also to hold meetings such as AGMs, to enjoy concerts etc. But Paul was reminding the Corinthians, those early Christians, that their faith was in the one true foundation of God’s building, Jesus Christ. This was in the context of disagreements among them as to whether they should follow Paul or Apollos or Peter; no, says Paul, the faith is the same; he and his fellow workers in Christ may express this differently but are all part of the team of builders who have shaped the early church as it started to spread among the Gentiles (non-Jews) away from the homeland of Israel. Jesus was their cornerstone - as he is ours. It is right that we should celebrate each anniversary of the consecration of our building of St Peter’s, and we look forward with joy to celebrating the 275th anniversary next summer, which we hope we will be able to do without any restrictions imposed because of the Covid pandemic. At the same time, we should look at ourselves to ensure that in our daily lives we are living in accordance with Jesus’s command to love, however we individually may express and live out our faith. We should not be paying lip service to our faith by merely turning up each Sunday to enable us to say that we have been to church.

This is what Jeremiah was sent by God to do, to remind the Jews who were turning up at the temple to worship the Lord, that what God was, is, looking for is how their worship was reflected in their daily lives. What God saw was the hypocrisy of those Judaeans, who used the temple building as a sanctuary but failed to follow their God faithfully: they dealt unfairly with one another; they oppressed the alien, the fatherless and the widow; they shed innocent blood; they stole; they murdered; they committed adultery and perjury; and they ran after other gods such as Baal. These failings are all too evident today. For example, aliens - ie immigrants - who arrive in this country without papers won’t get on an NHS list and so can’t get a Covid jab. Stealing: only last Saturday fans were stealing identity badges from stewards in order to get in to see the match. Shedding innocent blood and committing murder: we read all too often of frequent knifings, all causing the shedding of blood and some of which result in death. Adultery: well known in the upper echelons of our current government, never mind anywhere else.

And where did God send Jeremiah to speak out in this way? At the gate of the building that was the temple, the Lord’s house, where he could confront all those

Judaeans - God's building - who came in through that gate. Chapter 7 through to the end of chapter 10 are described as Jeremiah's Temple sermon and at this stage he is doing his best to remind his fellow Judaeans and Benjaminites - the southern Kingdom - that they should return to keeping the Torah, the Law passed down to them from Moses, if they were to return into God's good favour. Their hypocrisy would lead otherwise to the destruction of the Temple - as it did in fact not many years later in 586 BC - which they regarded as their sanctuary that would keep them going as a nation. They had not learned from the example of the other ten tribes - the northern Kingdom - which had already been broken up and disbanded. Our psalm tonight, No. 132, perhaps encouraged them to think that the temple was indestructible: ***"The Lord hath chosen Sion to be an habitation for himself; This shall be my rest for ever."*** But look at the condition laid down in verse 13: ***"If thy children will keep my covenant..."*** This is what Jeremiah was warning against in his sermon; they had not kept God's covenant but were breaking it by their behaviour and by their hypocrisy. So today, we are God's building, not a building of brick and stone, and so we are God's people, ***if*** we follow the teaching of Jesus and act in accordance with his command to love God and to love our neighbour - the immigrant, the poor, the displaced, as well as our friends and families.

Amen.