



Sermon by The Venerable John Kiddle, Archdeacon of Wandsworth

preached at Friends of St Mary's Barnes Annual Choral Evensong

Sunday 15th October 2017

It is both a privilege and a pleasure to be your preacher this evening, and very special to be part of this beautiful service of Evensong. We meet in this wonderful church celebrating the work of the Friends of St Mary's who do so much to support the care and repair of this building, and to nourish the life of St Mary's and the community it serves.

My only disappointment is that the catwalk from your recent fashion show is no longer in place down the aisle. I was very much looking forward to seeing how it could be adapted into the prayer book's beautiful liturgy

My apologies and sympathy go out to Richard, your Rector, who has had to listen to me preach twice in a fortnight, with no right of reply. Two weeks ago Richard and I were in Zimbabwe visiting our link diocese of Matabeleland; on that Sunday we drove many miles to a rural area of small villages around a town called Filabusi. We went to share in the celebrations of a confirmation of 30 children and adults; with Bishop Cleophas who some years ago spent some months in placement in this parish.

It was hot and dry; the rains are a long way off. But there in that village, very different from the village of Barnes, we saw a powerful reminder of what these buildings we call churches are about

We encountered welcome and hospitality, we saw the work of education and community care. We travelled with the Mothers Union from across the Diocese who brought in their van peanut butter, oil, flour, rice as a gift to the local school to enable the school to feed the children; hungry children don't learn. We walked to a farm project and saw land watered by a wind driven pump, growing food for all the village.

And at the heart of it all, a church – a place of sanctuary and rest, of worship and faith and the joy and commitment of those confirmed.

Like St Mary's, that church of St Matthew, a building at the heart of a community

Here too, a place, a space where, in a wide range of ways, people come together, lives are touched and the community is enabled to flourish.

The partnership here with the Friends of St Mary's is a vital part of that flourishing and life, not simply keeping the building going but being a catalyst for good in this community

Our epistle this evening from 1 John contains these words

See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.

For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.

The heart of our Christian calling is to love God, to love one another and to love our neighbour as ourself. We do so because God loves us

That is why St Mary's is here. A symbol of the love of God made known in Christ, and a place in which our love for God in worship and our love for each other in community is expressed and brought to life.

The relationship between buildings and community is a fascinating one.

Further down river, but also in my Archdeaconry, is one of the biggest developments at this moment in Europe - Battersea Nine Elms and Vauxhall, with Battersea Power Station at its heart. The Diocese of Southwark is seeking to be a part of that development, not simply to plant new congregations there, but getting people together to ask what does it mean not just to build wonderful glass covered buildings but to build community.

Where, for example, are the spaces in which people from different parts of the community might meet; existing residents, one side of the tracks – literally - and those moving into live, work, shop and play. There is a wonderful vision for church to be the place, the space on the boundary, where people meet. Perhaps the church even in that brave new world has a unique part to play.

Love one another

Centuries ago when the church built, it often built monasteries. Not just one space, but several sacred spaces.¹

for welcome and hospitality, a guest wing
for conversation and thought, the cloisters
for food and sustenance, the refectory
for work and art, in the garden or scriptorium
for discussion and decision making, in the Chapter House
for personal space and privacy, in the cells
for prayer and worship, in the chapel

Sacred spaces, created with stone walls and arches, in which people meet and exist, in which lives are lived, ideas are developed and souls are touched. In which relationships are formed and community is grown

Buildings to enable communities to flourish and lives to grow

Love one another

¹ I am grateful to the Revd George Lings for his work on Sacred Spaces which inspired this train of thought.

Even without the organised structure of a monastery isn't that just the range of things that happen here at St Mary's? Welcome and hospitality, conversation and thought, sustenance, art, music, work space and privacy and at its heart, worship and prayer.

And in all of this, in every encounter, in every conversation, in every quiet moment, in each prayer offered or song sung. In those moments of joyful celebration, or stolen silences, God is present, God is known.

The best architecture does not draw attention to itself but creates the beauty in which something else can happen. It's exactly the same with the best music, such as the beautiful music we have enjoyed this evening. Indeed architecture has quite wonderfully been described as frozen music.

Music, architecture, this building and our worship and liturgy are created to hold the space in which we encounter God, and know we are loved.

Bruckner's beautiful introit began our service this evening. *Locus iste a Deo factus este*, this place was made by God, a priceless sacrament. A physical space in which we encounter the love of God.

In Liverpool Cathedral, that most beautiful and vast space, designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott who also designed Battersea Power Station - and the red phone box! - is on the wall above the west door a line of nine words written in neon light by Tracy Emin. They are her own words which describe her encounter in Liverpool Cathedral.

I felt you and I knew you loved me

And that is our shared prayer, our shared aim, for all who come here. That in the architecture, in the music, in silence, in sadness and in celebration in private moments and formal worship. In welcome, in friendship and in community.

In building and people

In stones and in one another

this place is found to be that priceless sacrament of God

I felt you and I knew you loved me

John Kiddle