

Living Stones

Easter 5

1 Peter 2:2-10

From time to time when I visit my home town I take a little detour to drive down King Edward Street or Park Avenue. I take the detour for the sake of a bit of nostalgia to drive or walk past the two schools I attended. The buildings have happy memories but of course they are not the schools I attended. The staff and pupils of King Edward College have long moved on and Attleborough County Junior and Infant School is no longer a school – the last time I looked it was up for sale!

Ultimately schools and indeed churches, are people and not buildings and yet the buildings have a strange significance, and powerful draw.

The Jewish people had mixed feelings about buildings. For the first thousand years of their history their feelings were really quite negative. The presence of God was focused on the Ark of the Covenant a wooden chest which contained the tablets of stone on which were written the ten commandments. But the Ark of the Covenant had nothing grander than a tent to house it. King David, having built himself a grand palace decided to build a similar one for the Ark, for God. But the prophet Nathan reports God's refusal of the offer:

Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"

2 Samuel 7:5-7

No doubt God was rather offended that he was an afterthought once David had built a palace for himself. But there was a strong tradition in the Jewish people of being migrants, never settled and certainly not

imitating the grandiose building plans of other nations. They did not need pyramids! And in a time of political turbulence and continual warfare grand building plans may have been inappropriate.

However circumstances changed very quickly and in the time of David's son, King Solomon, peace returned and Solomon judged the time was right to build the first permanent place of worship – the Temple in Jerusalem.

That was 957 years before the birth of Jesus and the Temple lasted nearly five hundred years till it was totally destroyed by the invading [Babylonians](#) in 586 BC.

Just fifty years later a new, second temple was begun amidst great rejoicing and national revival, recorded in the book Ezra. This was the temple Jesus knew which was destroyed by the Romans in AD70.

The evidence is that Jesus had every respect for the temple as a building – he rather famously drove the money changers out because they were making a house of prayer a den of thieves. But he then went on to say that if they destroyed the temple he would raise it up in three days. The Jews interpreted him literally and ridiculed his claim – 'it took us forty six years to build it' they said.

But John responds that Jesus was talking about his own body. We might add that it was not only his personal body he would raise up but the church. The consequence of the death of Jesus was that he raised up a body made, ultimately, of millions of men and women. So the Temple that really matters is that which is made up of the people of God. From the Christian point of view the Temple in Jerusalem became superfluous. It was no longer necessary to offer sacrifices because Jesus had offered the ultimate sacrifice - himself. And when the Temple was destroyed in AD70 the Jews made no effort to restore it. Sacrifices ended once and for all.

And this is the image picked up by St Peter. It was probably written before the destruction of the Temple but its words would have seemed all the more relevant after that destruction:

As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him— you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 2: 4-6

In some ways it represents a return to the earliest Jewish understanding – the true temple is the people of God. And there are enormous consequences of this picture.

- First, every stone in a building has a place. Some are more visible than others and perhaps more decorative. But every stone has a place and if any one stone is removed then the building is incomplete. And that is true of the Church of God. Each of us has a part to play and none of us is more important than nay other.
- Second every building has a keystone or a corner stone, a foundation stone – and in the church that is Christ. A church that does not have Jesus Christ in such a prominent position is no longer a church. It should be our conscious aim to become more like Jesus, both as individuals and as a body.
- Third a living temple has the same purpose as a stone temple – to offer worship to God. That is why we are here today and that is why it matters that each one of us is here week in week out.

N Clews
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