

Over the last few months we have been looking at our Nave windows. In the aisles each of them has an Old Testament event on the left, and a related New Testament event on the right. Today we look at the third window towards the west in the South Nave Aisle, and its subject is the Temple.

It's a good weekend to do this, and I wish I could say I had planned it to be so. But, by happy accident, this weekend we celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The celebrations have taken place in grand settings: St Paul's Cathedral, Horse Guards Parade, and on the Mall towards Buckingham Palace today. They are great buildings and places, signifying the foundations and shaping of a nation and society. The buildings, the places, focus our thoughts and actions: what kind of nation are we, and what kind of nation do we want to be? Today's celebration is a great meal for all the charities of whom the Queen is a Patron: charitable dedicated service is not a bad foundation for a nation, I would say.

In the history of the people of God the Temple, with its surroundings, occupies a central and defining role. The building, and its place, was a focus of the hopes and aspirations and religion and practice of God's people. It's not that it was simply a place of worship: the way everything happened - in what was more like a campus than a cathedral - was shaped by and defined by worship and faithfulness to the commandments. Even the kind of money you carried into the temple had to be kosher, not idolatrous. You wouldn't want to bring anything which depicted a foreign God in - so nothing with Caesar's head. Outside the Temple Courts were people who could help you be a faithful Jew by exchanging the idolatrous money for coinage you could use to buy the animals to sacrifice - as commanded. Every detail covered. Doesn't sound so bad now, does it? But we'll come to that.

If what happened in and to the Temple was a kind of barometer of the faithfulness of God's people to the commandments, then the history of the Temple becomes the history of the people themselves. And, in a kind of stained glass shorthand, that's what our window depicts. At the very top, in the heart shaped tracery, are eight figures: Moses, Solomon, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezekiel, Nehemiah, Zerubbabel, Herod, John the Evangelist. Look them up - and it's Herod the Great, grandfather of the Herod you are thinking of - and you get a potted history of the people of Israel and whether they are close to God or far away.

**Moses:** the one whose leadership enabled the Israelites to re-inhabit the land promised to them, and whose gathering of the laws and practices of the people in the wilderness was the foundation of their national and religious life (and, remember, you couldn't separate one from the other). **Solomon,** given the task of building the first temple, in place of the tabernacle, the great marquee which signified the presence of God, and building it on Mount Moriah, where Abraham had been prepared to sacrifice Isaac. **Hezekiah,** who restored that Temple during the time of Isaiah the prophet, when the people had strayed. **Josiah,** the King who, after a further period of unfaithfulness, discovered the Book of the Law in the archives and restored Israel's worshipping practices. **Ezekiel,** who after that Temple was destroyed and the people taken into exile, had a vision of the new Temple, and held his people's hopes together that it might be restored. **Nehemiah,** who led the process of the rebuilding when the people returned to Jerusalem after seventy years. **Zerubbabel,**

the foreign Governor whose extraordinary generosity allowed that rebuilding. **Herod**, who, four hundred years later and after another period where the Temple had been desecrated, rebuilt it on a grand scale, and whose extent and floor plan is still evident today. Destroyed by the Romans in AD 70, it is at the Western Wall of Herod's Temple which Jews pray today, for restoration and for the security of the nation. **John the Evangelist**, whose vision of heaven is that there is no Temple in the New Jerusalem, because everything that happens will be enfolded in praise. The whole city is the Temple.

It is the Second Temple, which Nehemiah and Ezra are instrumental in restoring, which is depicted in our window. When the Israelites re-inhabited Jerusalem, after a 70 year absence, it took time for them to get round to restoring the Temple, but, with great rejoicing, the foundations are laid, and it's which we read about in Ezra 3. The reading spoke of priests playing trumpets and Levites clashing their cymbals. The very old had seen the First Temple, and they wept - the noise was such that it could be heard for miles. But not everyone was pleased, the building work stalled, and a decade or so later they have to be challenged by the prophets, like Haggai and Zechariah, who attack them for living in panelled houses while the temple remains only a set of foundations.

And so the Second Temple is completed, and remains the symbol of the presence of God and the faithfulness of the people. Three centuries later, after the further attacks, worship in the temple is restored under Judas Maccabeus, and the Jewish festival of Hanukkah, with eth seven branched candle stand, commemorates a new phase, with the enlarging of the temple under Herod the Great (who liked a good building - the Holy Land is littered with them). A century and a half later it is to that Temple which Jesus comes - probably each year (and certainly when he was twelve, and then as an adult), to worship, to pray and to teach. He knows it well, and he knows what it means.

What Jesus finds is a system of worship and action which has become separated from the commandments and purposes of God. Time and again through the Hebrew Scriptures God calls his people to renew and restore their worship and action. Though they might sacrifice, though they might outwardly obey the demands of the law, it has become clear that outward form and inward motivation have become disconnected. The actions of the Pharisees and the faithful might be very rigorous - no one could say it was not demanding - but the purpose had become unclear, and it could even have been that they were getting so much adulation from others that they had already received their reward.

It wasn't that the money changers were doing anything against the law. It was that what they were helping had become a business transaction with God, not an act of devout worship. Religion had become something just to do, not something which spoke of a whole life devoted to God. It's not about shops in churches, or even entrance charges, actually, but about whether our living and praying and worshipping connects to our thinking and speaking and doing. God is not to be bought off.

The question asked of us, in this great sign of God's presence and challenge, is whether we practice religion one hour a week, or express our whole life commitment to God in this time where we gather together. What we build and do, outwardly, should be the expression of all that we are as faithful disciples, not the religious theatre we enjoy every now and again. When God's people were faithful the Temple flourished. It is our faithful following which we should build - and then our church buildings will buzz with life. And we long for the day when all is wrapped up in praise, and in the new Jerusalem all is one in God.

