

There is no luggage space in a hearse!

Genesis 15¹⁻⁶; Psalm 32^{12-end}; Hebrews 11^{1-3,8-16}; Luke 12³²⁻⁴⁰

A city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. [Heb 11¹⁰]

Dr W Ingram Emslie was my first inspiration in preaching. I had endured many sermons of 40 or 50 minutes in length (more than 2 large mint imperials was regarded universally as too long) and had assimilated many coping strategies (counting organ pipes and adding the hymn numbers together were for good days - bad days meant multiply the hymn numbers). However, Dr Emslie was different. A consultant anaesthetist by day, a larger-than-life presence with an extravagant approach to dressing, preaching was his passion: he may have put people to sleep for a living, but he had the opposite effect in the pulpit!

Some 40 years later I still remember how he transformed the text of Hebrews 11 by explaining the simple phrase that Abram **looked forward to a city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God.** He explained that to a nomad people, living in foundation-less tents in a haphazard community that design and foundations were not just revolutionary, but so much better than their experience of life as they knew it. What God promises is specific and much more than we have already experienced.

I aspire to be that sort of preacher - the sort that isn't just remembered but who transforms the written text and changes lives as a result!

It is the faith that is sure that there is something better that permeates all the readings today - not in theoretical ways, but in ways that are transformative:

- ✦ It is this faith that looks forward - it is **the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.**
- ✦ It was this hope that managed to get Abram and his relatives to go in search of precisely the city that God had promised.
- ✦ It was this that got Abraham and Sarah, well beyond any reasonable expectations of fertility, to go to bed and to continue 'practicing' before Isaac arrived.

- ✦ It is this that helps Christians today to consider the needs of others as more important than acquiring 'stuff' that will all be left anyway.
- ✦ It is this that makes us think about where our treasure is - whether it is durable or disposable? There is no luggage space in a hearse.
- ✦ It is this that makes us live life that are prepared for welcoming God into them - ready for the bridegroom or servants ready for their master returning.
- ✦ It is this that helps us make sense of the world in which we live - because it is not our home.

While we were in France we heard the news that an 86 year-old priest had been killed at the altar. This time last week Penny and I shared with nearly 2000 worshippers at a Eucharist for Fr Hamel at Bourges Cathedral - it was clear that this savage attack had stirred the heart of the French people and they were turning to God for help in understanding and in living.

The Archbishop of Rouen, Mgr Lebrun, in his homily at Fr Hamel's funeral, revealed that his last words, as the priest at the altar tried to push away his attackers with his feet were, *Go away, Satan!*

He recounted that Father Hamel had been ordained a priest for 58 years, adding that before the priest's years of faithful charity, "I feel small." "Jacques, you were a faithful disciple of Jesus. Wherever you went, you did well."

Rightly, the old priests' confidence in the resurrection was stated before the Archbishop stated: "Let us be simple and true with ourselves. It is in our hearts, in the depth of our hearts that we must say 'Yes' or 'No' to Jesus, 'Yes' or 'No' to the path of truth and of peace; 'Yes' or 'No' to the victory of love over hate, 'Yes' or 'No' to his resurrection."

People of faith do have the responsibility under God to make the world a better, safer place BUT that is merely upgrading your travel arrangements.

What we are looking for is what God has promised - **a city with foundations whose architect and builder is God.**