

Standing on the Shoulders of Giants

Jeremiah 23²³⁻²⁹; Psalm 82; Hebrews 11^{29-12²}; Luke 12⁴⁹⁻⁵⁶

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... let us run with perseverance the race that is before us, looking to Jesus. [Hebrews 12¹⁻²]

These past months, since Candlemass, have been but a blink in the history of the Church in this Parish. There has been a Church here since 900 and the 7 months we have been 'in exile' is nothing compared that long heritage.

(Forgive me if you know this already, but it is worth reminding ourselves)

Building works aren't new - there were two wooden Churches on the site before the first stone Church in 1170, and at some point before the 15th century, the chancel was in its current position. In the 19th century, in 1821 and in 1875, the Church was totally rebuilt (a much grander scheme than ours).

Change isn't new - in 1700 the Parish of St Mary's went from Soho Hill to Kingstanding and there were only 200 souls resident in the Parish. Then came the Industrial Revolution and Handsworth and then Handsworth Wood became attractive places for the wealthy to live and eventually the city of Birmingham was born in 1905.

Vision isn't new - this Church gave birth to 12 daughter and grand-daughter Churches that still survive today (and as a result the Rector lost 9/10 of his income). It was my predecessor, Canon Hall, who prepared the ground for this stage of our life together when he warned you that there would have to be changes in the future and the ideas for reordering first raised by his predecessor, Canon Tomkins.

I am always aware that we stand on the shoulders of giants and in all that we do, I pray, that those who will follow us will think that the work we do will have served them well.

The author to the Hebrews tells us that **we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses**. That is such a great Christian truth - even when we are on our own we are never alone. Those who are now in God's nearer presence who, in life, inspired us can inspire us still and those who comforted us comfort us still.

Then the author inspires us to keep going, especially when the going is tough. The inspiration for this is the one who stands at the centre of our faith and hope: **looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.**

- ✠ The image is of a race, perhaps at the early Olympics, when competitors ran naked so that nothing hindered their determination to win. So we are invited to **lay aside every weight and the sins that clings so closely**. Many of those who are more 'mature' may remember the Billy Graham rally's in the UK. AT the early ones Bev Shea could be heard singing, *I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold, I'd rather have Jesus than pleasures untold. I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world affords today.* Could we sing that? The greatest weakness of our contemporary faith is that we want Jesus, but we want to add our faith to anything and everything else we want. It is all too often like running a race but carrying all our belongings on our backs, then wondering why we don't cross the line first, if at all.
- ✠ The challenge is to know what we want and to want it enough to persevere. Jesus saw through the cross to the hope beyond and calls us to be so focused on the life that is already held by God that we too **endure** so that we too can take our place with God.

If we will be the giants on whose shoulders those who come after us can stand it isn't in what we do to buildings, but the legacy of being the people God calls us to be so that when we join that **great cloud of witnesses** it is our faith that shines through.