



St. Marylebone
Parish Church

Lent 3 2021 11 am

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Temple in Jerusalem was the epicentre of Jewish life.

By the time of Jesus, the Temple stood on the largest ritual platform anywhere in the world.

According to Jewish tradition, the holiest of all the many holy places in the Temple precincts stood on the spot that was the very first scrap of formed land created out of Chaosⁱ (the foundation stone of the world).

This stone was also regarded as the very place from which God scooped up a ‘handful’ of dust to create Adamⁱⁱ; it was the rock to which Abraham took Isaac as a sacrificeⁱⁱⁱ and the stone used by Jacob as a pillow as he laid down to dream^{iv}.

King David dreamed of constructing a Temple to replace the peripatetic ‘Tent of Meeting’^v, to provide a truly permanent House for God, and he purchased a site on which to build, the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite^{vi}, but it was his son, King Solomon, who turned his father’s Temple dream into a magnificent reality in wood and stone^{vii}.

Nearly 500 years later, Solomon’s Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians at the time of the Exile^{viii} before being rebuilt by Zerubbabel^{ix} on the Exiles’ return and nearly 500 years on Herod the Great^x undertook yet more building works, and *this* is the Temple which Jesus knew and prophesied against.^{xi}

To threaten the Temple, or even to question any of the Temple's long-held and carefully policed practices and traditions was nothing less than suicidal blasphemy. Anyone foolish enough to do so, had opted for a one-way ticket to certain execution.

Jesus was not against the Temple, *per se*, any more than he was against the Law or the Prophets^{xii}, but Jesus *was* against what the Temple had become, in the same way that he was against how people had come to regard God's Law and Prophets.

The Temple had, in Jesus' eyes, become a marketplace, a travesty of what was the most holy place of worship on earth.

Jesus comes to the Temple and declares himself quite openly as the 'new Temple'; he is 'Holy of Holies', he is the One who offers perfect worship to the Father and from whose broken body a new and living Temple will rise.

This Temple will not be made by hands, but through his obedient death on a cross.

In *this* Temple there will be no stones, no wood, no metal; it will be constructed from the living flesh and blood of the men and women who would become his Resurrection body.

This Temple is the Universal Church, against which nothing can ever prevail and which will last until time itself comes to an end, when all things: everything that was and is and could be, will be gathered up into God's eternity through him from whom and in whom and by whom everything that is has its origin.

Until then, until his coming again in glory, Jesus declares, the new and perfect Temple will be found only in his own resurrected body, and never again will God's presence be limited to a certain place or restricted to a certain people; God will be acknowledged everywhere by everyone.

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, St Paul writes, *'We are the temple of God in the world'*^{xiii}, the living temple, in which the Word of God is eternally proclaimed.

This is really heady stuff for the Third Sunday in Lent – or indeed for any day - but it is the very ground-rock of our faith, *'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints'*.^{xiv}

Jesus speaks of his body as 'the Templ'e, a 'living Temple'. Saint Peter speaks^{xv} of us as 'living stones' being built into a 'spiritual house', around Jesus, who is himself the 'living corner stone'.

Yet, so often, we can get stuck in dead stones, whether it is in buildings or traditions or practices that are long dead, atrophied 'things', redundant 'stuff' which can become more important to us than being a 'living stone'.

Lent is our much-needed annual 'wake-up call', to check how alive we are! A timely invitation to ask ourselves: what in our spiritual lives, what in our reading and praying; what in our worshipping and living needs to be cleared out, done away with, got rid of, so that our faith can once again live – so that we can be a truly living stone in the Temple that is Christ's body, the Church?

Jesus cautions us against being careless or blasé about our faith and our practices, and we need the gentle help and guidance of the Holy Spirit to help us look very carefully at ourselves to help us discern just how *alive* our faith is; to see what mars our worship and clutters up our relationship with God.

So ask yourself, how can you clear out the junk and the clutter and the stuff to make room, to make Sacred Space for God each and every day?

It's a good question, too good just for Lent. What do I need to be to be a living stone in God's Temple? Amen.

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- ⁱ Genesis 1.9
 - ⁱⁱ Genesis 1.27 and Genesis 2.7
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 22.1-19
 - ^{iv} Genesis 28.10-22
 - ^v Exodus 33.7
 - ^{vi} 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21
 - ^{vii} 1 Kings 6.1-6
 - ^{viii} 2 Kings 25, 8-9
 - ^{ix} Ezra 5.2
 - ^x BC72 – BC4
 - ^{xi} Mark 13.2
 - ^{xii} Matthew 5.17
 - ^{xiii} 1 Corinthians 3.16
 - ^{xiv} Jude 1.3
 - ^{xv} 1 Peter 2.4-6