



The 80th Service
of the
United Guilds
of the
City of London

Friday 15th March 2024

11.15 am

Sermon by the Dean

The Very Reverend Andrew Tremlett

1 Corinthians 3.9-15

⁹For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building. ¹⁰According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹²Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — ¹³the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. ¹⁴If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. ¹⁵If the work is burned, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire.

*⁹For we are God's servants, working together;
you are God's field, God's building.*

What does your life rest on?

What are the foundations of your life?

One of the features of life in the City of London is that, in the nicest way possible, you are constantly put in your place.

I hasten to add that I don't mean by that a personal slight or a deliberate intent, but rather you are constantly surrounded by the achievements of others, and there is the inevitable sense of imposter syndrome.

For me, a casual stroll down Dean's Aisle means a conversation with my predecessors: the poet, scholar, soldier, private secretary and Ironmonger, John Donne on the one hand, and the Renaissance humanist, educator, Theologian, and Mercer, John Colet, on the other.

Look around you and you cannot help but be overwhelmed by the brilliance of Sir Christopher Wren.

Or to quote the Lord Mayor at last night's banquet when he reflected on the City of London as the World's Coffee House and the role of the Livery – paraphrasing Wren's own memorial:

“Si monumentum libertatis requiris,
civitatem circumspice”

[“If you are looking for a monument to the Livery, look around the City]

The Crypt below us holds the memorials of Florence Nightingale and Alexander Fleming, soon to be joined by:

- **Kofoworola Abeni Pratt (1915-1992):** *one of the first black nurses in the NHS.*
- **Humanitarian Aid Workers:** *remembering those who have died in the course of their service, as well as celebrating those continuing to do so.*
- **Professor Sir James Black OM (1924-2010):** *physician and pharmacologist, winner of the Nobel Prize for Medicine for his development of the Beta blocker class of drugs.*

As I mused with one audience from the Livery recently, all this leaves me with the distinct feeling that I really should do something worthwhile with my life!

¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ.

But the truth is, we are all simply building on the foundations laid by others.

In the last year we have celebrated the tercentenaries of both Sir Christopher Wren, the architect, and of Edward Strong, the master mason who actually built St Paul's.

Last September, through my own Livery Company's support for stonemasonry, I was privileged to bless a memorial to Wren at the site of the quarry on Portland Island, the stone from which this cathedral was built.

Seeing the stones hewn from the ground, loaded at the King's Pier, and then shipped up the coast to the mouth of the Thames and then brought by barge into the City, there could be no more graphic illustration of how the brilliance of one individual literally built on the sweat and labour and toil of others working far away.

But to continue with the stone analogy, I am indebted to my colleague here – Dr Paula Gooder – who pointed out the difference in the New Testament between two words which are often used for ‘stone’ but have subtly different meanings.

Petra [πέτρα] – which is the bedrock, the foundation, the underlying strata – and *Lithos* [λίθος] – which is the dressed stone, a precious stone. Put simply, those working in the quarry at Portland were dealing with the πέτρα; Christopher Wren, Edward Strong and his band were creating the λίθος here.

¶ So the question this morning is: what are the foundations on which your life is built?

Human experience is often that, rather than any single foundation, our lives are held together by a host of people, places and experiences from which our identity is drawn, and our personal history shaped.

As probably every person in this cathedral will recognise, take away one of those fundamental building blocks – health, relationship, financial security to name but a few – and the world soon begins to look very different.

For each of us, we traverse the challenges of caring for our loved ones, negotiating the ending of a relationship, coming to terms with lost ambition or acknowledging that our life's work now lies in the hands of others.

And as we do so, the dressed stone of our lives, the parts we put on show – the *lithos* [λίθος] – gets a little bit more weathered and chipped, and what gets revealed is the *petra* [πέτρα], the foundation which underlies it all.

¶ It is now one month since the death of the Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny: murdered either through the direct action of the Putin regime or through the shocking conditions in which he was held.

In a country where freedom of expression has largely been extinguished, Navalny's was a singular voice speaking out against the corruption of a system whose actions have led to the deaths of many 10s of 1,000s in Ukraine, the displacement of millions and the very real prospect of war in the margins of Europe.

Less well known are the foundations on which Navalny built his life and his commitment to truth. Speaking at the end of his trial in 2021¹ he said:

If you want, I'll talk to you about God and salvation... The fact is that I am a Christian, which usually rather sets me up for constant ridicule in the Anti-Corruption Foundation, because mostly our people are atheists, and I was once quite a militant atheist myself.

But now I am a believer, and that helps me a lot in my activities, because everything becomes much, much easier... There are fewer dilemmas in my life, because there is a book in which, in general, it is more or less clearly written what action to take in every situation.

¹ <https://www.rightsinrussia.org/navalny-2/>

Navalny continued:

It's not easy to follow this book, of course, but I am actually trying... 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.' I've always thought that this particular commandment is more or less an instruction to activity.

And so, while certainly not really enjoying the place where I am, I have no regrets about coming back, or doing what I'm doing... Because at some difficult moment I did as required by the instructions, and did not betray the commandment.

It is not in the days of sunshine and cool breezes that our fundamental values are revealed, whether – like Navalny – they are drawn from the Christian tradition or any other of the great faiths and philosophies which have shaped our world, but rather it is in the times of adversity and hardship and challenge when our foundations, the bedrock of our lives, are laid bare.

¶ So I cannot stand in this pulpit without reflecting for a moment on how Sir Winston Churchill, so honoured in this place, would have responded to the comments made by former President Trump encouraging Russia to ‘do whatever the hell they like’ to NATO countries, or to the remarks of Pope Francis who ‘believe[s] that the strongest are those who see the situation, think about the people and have the courage to raise the white flag and negotiate’.

If for Churchill, it was true in 1940 that *'Upon this battle depends the survival of Christian civilisation'*², I suspect – whether we choose to acknowledge it or not – the future of European culture is being decided 1,800 miles away in the muddy fields and bombed-out buildings of the east of Ukraine.

This is indeed a time when the dressed stone is being shattered, and our foundations will be laid bare.

'For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.'

² <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1940-the-finest-hour/their-finest-hour/>

[1240 words]

1 Kings 6.1-13

¹In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites came out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, which is the second month, he began to build the house of the LORD. ²The house that King Solomon built for the LORD was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. ³The vestibule in front of the nave of the house was twenty cubits wide, across the width of the house. Its depth was ten cubits in front of the house. ⁴For the house he made windows with recessed frames.* ⁵He also built a structure against the wall of the house, running around the walls of the house, both the nave and the inner sanctuary; and he made side chambers all round. ⁶The lowest story* was five cubits wide, the middle one was six cubits wide, and the third was seven cubits wide; for round the outside of the house he made offsets on the wall in order that the supporting beams should not be inserted into the walls of the house.

⁷ The house was built with stone finished at the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the temple while it was being built.

⁸ The entrance for the middle story was on the south side of the house: one went up by winding stairs to the middle story, and from the middle story to the third. ⁹So he built the house, and finished it; he roofed the house with beams and planks of cedar. ¹⁰He built the structure against the whole house, each story* five cubits high, and it was joined to the house with timbers of cedar.

¹¹ Now the word of the LORD came to Solomon, ¹²'Concerning this house that you are building, if you will walk in my statutes, obey my ordinances, and keep all my commandments by walking in them, then I will establish my promise with you, which I made to your father David. ¹³I will dwell among the children of Israel, and will not forsake my people Israel.'

