



Sermon Preached at William Temple Church, Wythenshawe.
Sunday 19th April 2015

by the Venerable Alan Wolstencroft

50th Anniversary Celebrations 1965-2015 (70th Ann W.T death)

Easter 3 (Acts 3 12-19. Luke 24. 36-48)

You are Witnesses (A jolly calling)

Firstly let me say what a great joy it is for me to, once again, share in the worship with you here at William Temple Church, a Church which, like Wythenshawe itself, I grew very fond of when I was a neighbouring incumbent at St Martin's in the 1970s. It was a fondness which grew as Area Dean, and then some years later as Archdeacon, as I shared with you some of the toils and tribulations of a wonderful building, but one not without its problems.

Now still rather splendid in a more secure setting and with its own Tram stop opposite the Civic Centre, I feel privileged to have been invited to share in this year of celebration which marks the 50th anniversary of the Church and the 70th anniversary of the death of Manchester's most remarkable Bishop, and of one of England's greatest, but short lived, Archbishops.

On a previous occasion here I reminded the congregation, some of whom I'm glad to see still keeping the faith, of some words of

William Temple who, twelve months after becoming Bishop of Manchester in 1921, wrote to a friend, "*This life is a wild kind of turmoil. But it is jolly to be in a place where so much happens and where one is really up against the things that matter. It is in that way the most invigorating job I have had.*"

I don't think the word "jolly" will readily spring to the minds of those who, after the early glory days, persevered through difficult years of reduced congregations and the demise of children's and youth activities, and struggled with a building that, for all its modernistic creative beauty proved, at times, more of a burden than a blessing. That's not of course to say that it has not been a source of blessing to the many who have worshipped here, been baptised here, confirmed, married and buried from here, for indeed it has for countless numbers of people who will give witness and thanks that it has been so.

The challenges of a copper roof that caused problems from the start with youngsters finding it an ideal sledge run on their bakers' trays, and the windows which seemed to encourage stone throwing practice, to say nothing of the heating and the need to ensure that you were sitting in the right place to keep warm and to avoid compulsory swimming practice, all presented, shall we say, challenges to the congregation, Churchwardens, PCC and clergy for many years.

Yet the building remains a beacon in this community. Its striking design and spacious interior with its simple but beautiful overarching cross and furnishings, all designed by one of the renowned architects of the day, George Pace, whose insistence that the central baptistery girders form the main support of the roof, and that the quiet, yet integral chapel and fittings, all serve to act as sermons in architecture and make this a building you, the diocese, and the wider community can be rightly proud of.

Temple's words of being in a place "*where so much happens and where one is really up against the things that matter*" proved to be

so true for this Church set in the heart of a new town that somehow was never allowed to become one, in spite of the many promises.

Yet here in this place, and sometimes against all the odds, the Christian faith has been proclaimed, and this year of joyous celebration is but another step in promoting, not just the Church building, or indeed William Temple, but promoting the Eastertide hope and promise held out to us by the Risen Christ who not only in our gospel says *'Peace be with you'* but says *'You are my witnesses'*.

We meet this morning, as we do every time we gather to celebrate the ongoing life giving spirit of Jesus Christ, and we hear from the Acts of the Apostles of Peter witnessing, boldly teaching and preaching the faith entrusted to him, and doing so in the city of Jerusalem where Jesus had so cruelly been put to death and where the followers of the way were threatened with the same fate.

Coupled with that reading we have a gospel account of one of those strange post resurrection appearances where Jesus greets his frightened, disillusioned and doubtful followers with the words of peace, before showing them the wound marks of hands and feet and opening their minds to understand the scriptures and the truth about himself and what he had fulfilled through his death and resurrection.

But he doesn't leave it there. He informs them "that his name and what he achieved must be proclaimed to all nations beginning from Jerusalem", and "that each one of them have been called to be witnesses to this", so that people can once more be drawn into the folds of God's generous love.

This is the same commission that inspired William Temple, centuries later who, although in one sense was born and bred into the Church, developed his faith and theology centered on the risen Christ and on the compassionate ministry of Christ, a ministry which valued all people as being of equal worth. Temple developed the notion of social order based on individual freedom

only being acceptable within a corporate freedom, a corporate freedom which was based on shared values. His notion of the Common Good was based on Love and not on a notion subject to market forces or personal rights.

Temple's concern for social order, based on his love of God and people, enabled him to become the great teacher and preacher that he surely was, but it also gained him great respect in the eyes of the general public, so much so, that he was much sought after by politicians and other movers and shakers of his day.

It is no secret that he was a driving force behind so many of the social reforms that found fruition in the post war years, with Ernest Bevin and William Beveridge seeking his help and advice as they shaped the social and health reforms that would be needed to be put in place for a war battered country.

Temple was an honest and true leader, he cared about people and he understood their problems, and what's more, they knew that he cared and understood! For much of the time he travelled by bus and train and, of course, for most of his ministry in Manchester the diocese included what is now Blackburn Diocese, so it meant trips to Lancaster and beyond as he made his way about the diocese in what's described as *"an entirely unself-conscious manner with a ready smile and cheerful greeting."* His biographer says *"Here was someone people understood, someone with real dignity, but no airs or graces, someone who walked about amongst them as one of themselves"*

In August 1925, an amusing diary note records part of his Annual Blackpool Beach Mission, *"I took a small and most delightful Confirmation at St Stephens on the Cliffs of 5 dancing girls from the Winter Gardens, who are shortly going to New York"*. He no doubt would have described that as jolly.

We meet in a very different context to Blackpool beach or, indeed, to a Manchester in Temple's day, and certainly a very different context to the Jerusalem of Peter's day, or the Upper Room in

which those fearful disciples met, its all so very different, yet the faith in the Risen Christ remains the same, the commission, the call to be witnesses remains the same.

We too can be jolly, for we concern ourselves with the things that matter in this world, in this country, in this community, in our society, amongst our families, our friends, colleagues, acquaintances, for we concern ourselves with the things of God, a God who created us, a God who loves us, a God who calls us as individuals to work in partnership with him in Changing our lives, changing our world into the sort of place where all people are respected, where all are seen to be what they are, daughters and sons of God.

I close with words of affirmation and encouragement and a reminder of our Christian calling, our witness, words which I, with some shame, confess I had long forgotten, but was recently reminded of as I prepared to share in this your year of remembering your patron William Temple.

He wrote in his book 'Christianity and the Social Order':

"The commission given to the Church is that it carries out the purposes of God.

That is what it means to be the 'body of Christ' .

The members of the Church do not, or should not, belong to it for what they can get in this world or in any other world;

they - we - should belong to it in order to take our share in the great fulfillment of God's purposes in the world and beyond it."

"Take our share in the great fulfillment of God's purposes in the world"

That's our - jolly calling

Amen