

## BRICKS AND MORTAR A Reflection



In a six week TV series called, ‘English Cathedrals’, Tony Robinson explores some of the most prominent cathedrals in that country; their architecture, history, and impact on the towns that surround them.

At one point, Liverpool Cathedral was featured. It's a relatively modern structure, began in 1901 and completed in 1975, constructed not of large stones like other cathedrals, but of brick, brick making being an important local industry. The cathedral is an impressive building in the gothic style, but definitely modern. However, within 20 years of its completion, cracks began to appear in the walls. Tony was puzzled about this. Much older cathedrals, built up to a thousand years ago, showed no signs of such stress fractures for hundreds of years after their completion, and that was usually because of later additions of huge towers or heavy bells, the weight of which eventually took its toll on the walls.

Tony talked to an engineer who was responsible for the care of the building, and asked him why this should be so. His reply was that the 20th century builders used a different mortar mixture from that used by the mediaeval stonemasons. The mediaeval mortar contained more lime. That meant that as the building shifted with the small movements of the earth and the elements (a tall tower can move several centimetres in a high wind) the mortar allowed for more flexibility, so that the building could move back and forth without the walls cracking. 20th century mortar mixture contained less lime, which made the structure rigid, so that such shifts put much more stress on the building, and caused cracking. If unintended, these would eventually widen to the point that the building would fall apart.

This got me thinking about what might be between us, the ‘living stones,’ that comprise the church today. We understand fully that the church is built on the strongest of foundations - Jesus - but what is the composition of the ‘mortar’ that binds us together? Does it allow for flexibility, or is it so rigid that the church’s very fabric is in danger of cracking and falling apart?

We each value our own church culture (Anglo-Catholic, Evangelical, Orthodox, etc.) and for a multitude of reasons we each view doctrine and scriptures through different lenses. This doesn’t mean that only one is absolutely right and all others absolutely wrong. In fact we can all learn from each other, and are contingent on each other. To examine these things through someone else’s eyes may lead us to a deeper understanding not possible if we huddle in our own corner. This is not wishy-washy. This is searching for a place to see each other through Jesus’ eyes of love.

Each of us has to ‘work out our own salvation with fear and trembling,’ (*Philippians 2:12*), so if we approach each other understanding that we are all striving to do just that, perhaps some sort of flexibility will emerge that helps us to withstand the stresses caused by our differences.

Perhaps Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, can help us out here. In chapter thirteen (*vs. 4-13*) he lists the attributes of love, the same love with which Christ demonstrates his passionate care of us. What would happen, I wonder, if we see these as ingredients in the mortar between us that both separates and binds us?

*PATIENCE:*

What would happen if instead of being irritated by someone’s differing views, becoming defensive of our own and refusing to admit other possibilities, we practice loving patience as we listen to their rhetoric, remembering that Jesus quite often has to wait patiently for us to realise the truth?

*KINDNESS:*

What would happen if instead of wanting to send the opposition to hell, we view them with the kindness that Jesus demonstrates in not condemning (*John 3:17*), but loving us through this period in our lives?

*ENVY:*

What would happen if, in hearing about the gifts and works of other, we didn’t envy them, but congratulated and encouraged them, as Jesus encourages us when we work to get it right?

*BOASTING, ARROGANCE, RUDENESS:*

What would happen if, in putting forward our views, we did not treat others out of self righteous arrogance, or boast about our spiritual prowess or treat them with contempt? After all, Jesus, the most righteous of all, never resorts to that in his treatment of us. He simply loves us.

*INSISTING ON OUR OWN WAY:*

What would happen if we refuse to respond to group decisions by banging on the table and insisting that things have to go our way, because if they don’t we’ll become irritable and resentful, and possibly take our bat and ball and go home? It seems that Jesus has been working for all time to bring people around to his way of thinking, and not once has he retired to his corner to suck his thumb when we refuse to do it his way. He simply keeps loving us, working in us, and longing for us to love him. As he did with the rich young man, Jesus looks at us, and loves us.

*REJOICING IN WRONGDOING:*

What would happen if we didn’t gloat over the sins of others, as if it proved our own righteousness, ensuring our ticket to heaven? And what would happen if we dedicated ourselves to seeking the truth in the One who *is* the Truth?

*BEARING, BELIEVING, HOPING, ENDURING:*

And what would happen if we bear with those who *are* envious, who arrogantly boast, who treat others with rudeness, who lose their cool when things don’t go their way, or gloat over another’s weaknesses? Can we believe in the way that Christ, who bears *us* on his shoulders, believes that we are essentially good, even if we don’t see it ourselves, always hoping for our healing and redemption and enduring with us to the end?

If we can do all that, then there is a good chance that the church will withstand the elements from within and without, and continue to survive, even flourish. As well as that, in our flexing and

moving we make room for the Holy Spirit (the most important ingredient of the mortar between us), who makes it possible for us to demonstrate Christ's love to each other and to the world.

And according to Paul, that's the love that will endure to the end.

And.... really.... nothing else matters.

*The Rev'd. Sr. Sandra Sears CSBC - 27/5/20  
(During the week of prayer for Christian unity)*