

FOUNDERS AND BENEFACTORS EVENSONG YORK MINSTER

George Herbert, the great English poet, wrote about the life of a country parson and gave advice to them on how to preach to country people whom he said were, wait for it! “thick - and heavy - and hard to raise to a point of zeal and fervency, and need a mountain of fire to kindle them.”!

This description came to mind recently when reading a commentary on this evening's Gospel. Jesus was leaving the Temple when one of the disciples exclaimed, “Teacher, just look at these massive stones! What a magnificent building”.

The commentator pointed out that the disciples were rural Galileans, country people who had come up to the City, and they were taken aback, overawed by the extraordinary sight of the Jerusalem Temple.

Whether or not we have come up from the country this evening we too might be equally stunned by the magnificence of this glorious Minster and be inclined to agree with the disciples and to exclaim, “What a magnificent building!”.

Today the Church remembers Bishop Lancelot Andrews who was well acquainted with magnificent buildings having been Dean of Westminster Abbey, Bishop of Chichester and Bishop of Winchester. He was one of the great Christian teachers in the reigns of both Elizabeth I and James I.

One of his celebrated insights was about gratitude.

“Gratitude is the praise we offer God” he wrote and listed those things for which we should give thanks including: “ for benefactors never to be forgotten ...”.

He encouraged us to be thankful even and especially for those things that we have forgotten and take for granted.

This Evensong is about rescuing from the hidden recesses of our minds the debt of gratitude we owe to this sacred building and to its many benefactors who have built and sustained it, and to thank God for the influence that it has had either consciously or subconsciously on countless lives and on our own faith.

Such thanksgiving might even stir in you and me the same spirit of benefaction so that we might bequeath to the next generation the same generous legacy that has been handed down to us.

But let me take you back to that episode when the sight of the Temple stones took away the breath of the disciples’.

How did Jesus react? As so often happened, he responded in a surprising way. Instead of repeating their praise, he spoke prophetically about its demise, “Not one stone here will be left on another, every one will be thrown down.”!

You might think that this is the last thing that I should be saying this evening. But you’d be wrong because all that Jesus taught, and lived and died for, was to see our earthly life on the landscape of Eternity.

The Temple in Jerusalem was designed and built as a replica of the Garden of Eden and of the new restored Kingdom of God that was to come. This Minster was similarly built to fix our eyes upon Heaven itself.

But, of course, Heaven doesn’t impinge much on people’s consciousness today. Recently I was asked to talk about how the world has changed in my lifetime. I offered 5 features A to E.

A Authority is no longer respected in the way that it once was.

B Beliefs are subjective and relative so that people talk about MY truth rather than The Truth.

C Culture, our culture, is concussed so that people have forgotten the roots, the Christian roots, of our civilisation.

D Dictatorships seem to secure greater social cohesion than democracies.

E Eternity is no longer seen to hold any consequences for how we have lived our lives on earth.

It is against this shifting culture that this Minster stands today as a signpost to the Kingdom that is yet to come. The one that we pray for daily in the Lours's Prayer. It will not last for eternity, but while it stands it raises our sights and our spirits to Heaven itself.

And it is with Eternity in mind and out of gratitude for all that we have been given that we should now live and give - of ourselves.

The Right Reverend Bishop James Jones KBE 25th September 2025.