

## **Sermon at the Eucharist to mark the closure of St Luke's in the city 17.10.2021**

Some phrases from our scriptures for today have been fermenting in my heart and mind as we have drawn closer to this historic moment in the life of the people of St Luke's in the city parish, my parish.

*'Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labour in vain*

*Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain'*

*'How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts'*

*'Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ'.*

*'Love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for ones friends.'*

On St Luke's Day October 18<sup>th</sup> 1859, Bishop Harper laid the foundation stone of the first church to be built on our parish site. In April 1867, Revd Edward Lingard was instituted as the first incumbent of the parish.

The whole parish of St Luke the Evangelist would have joined in the Amen to the resolution which was signed by the churchwardens and Vestry on Monday November 1<sup>st</sup> 1909. The building of the stone church had been a major and magnificent effort absorbing the energies of the parish for over four years, replacing the earlier wooden Church. Here is the resolution:

*'The members of the Vestry at this first meeting since the Opening and Consecration of the new Church, desire to express and record their deep and heartfelt feelings of gratitude to their Heavenly Father for His great goodness and loving kindness in so abundantly blessing the work of building the church, and enabling it to be brought to such perfection, and for his gracious answer to our prayers in enabling us to offer to Him, and to consecrate to his service free of debt, this house which he has enabled us to build in his honour, and for his worship and praise. May the church ever remind us, and all who worship therein, of God's mercy and goodness towards us, and of his gracious willingness to hear and*

*answer the prayers of his children who ask in faith, and may his blessings ever rest upon this house and upon those who ever draw nigh to him in thankful love and faith, in this his sanctuary.' Thus spoke the angel of St Luke's' whom we will hear more about later in this homily.*

And so the parish ebbed and flowed over the years developing the facets which have come to embody its style and culture. Mrs Lingard reported at the AGM in 1902 on the abundance of social activities in the parish 'I know little of workers or of work done in other parishes, but this I do know, that when anything is needed to be done here one can always rely on plenty of willing hands to do it and to do it well'. Nothing has changed! Strong Christian education, and outreach into the city. Under Fr Frederick Taylor we saw a distinct shift in style towards the Anglo Catholic tradition which was firmly entrenched during the time of Fr Isaac Richards. We see the close support and work of several sisters of the CSN, amongst them Sisters Mary, Joy Grace, Lucy and our beloved Sr Judith. Every vicar made their imprint and in more recent times we recall the ministries of Simon Acland, Jim Riley and David Moore and our dear friend Jim Mckenna

All these and many others some of you here this evening have shaped St Luke's over the years into its distinctive kaupapa. A deep contemplative spirituality, a yearning to bring people together in the city, a reaching put without judgement

Walter Wink the American Theologian believes and so do I, every ministry unit, congregation or parish has its own angel. Every city every grouping of human beings develops its own specific group identity. This angel holds the groups wairua, the soul, the guiding spirit of the community which has developed and grown over the years and shapes how the community acts and shares and believes. The angel has some good traits and some not so good. And it is this angel personality which draws or repels new people into the community so that they themselves are shaped by this kaupapa and begin in themselves to reflect these traits which persist through generations.

Wink writes of some research he did in a town in Norfolk in England. An uptown parish was combined some years ago with a down-town parish. It all seemed like a well thought out structure but for some reason or other the parishioners from both parishes simply did not and would not

get on with each other. What on earth was causing this strife. Through an in-depth series of interviews the students researching the issue finally found someone who could explain what it was all about. This person's family had lived in Norfolk for countless generations.. The researchers were told that the reason the two communities didn't and wouldn't get on was because the uptown people had let the invading Vikings into the city in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. Amazing, but true. These group personality traits shape all those who are part of or join the particular group over many many years

So what can we say of the angel of St Luke's in the City. Can I describe the angel of St Luke's. Well I'll have a go. The angel has a deep and contemplative sense of spirituality, a yearning for reflective silence in our liturgies, a reverence for the mass as the core of our life. The angel welcomes people just as they are and reaches out to support those on the edges, those who are seeking refuge or maybe feeling beaten up by the church or city. There is at its heart a contemplative silence and with all the hassles in life that happen to all of us on the surface, a deep and secure faith in the goodness and faithfulness of God in Jesus Christ. This is the community and it is the church building whose walls were permeated, imbued with the prayers, the laughter and tears of its people, their hopes and dreams, their fears and their anxieties. The angel can also be stubborn

Last Sunday we had a service to acknowledge our grief and sadness at the closing of our parish. We shared stories, some raw emotion including anger. Several people spoke about how St Luke's had offered them refuge and a home at a time when they felt alone and vulnerable, a place and a community to be. There was expressed amidst the grief a deep love and thankfulness for all that has been over these 162 years. I sensed the angel of St Luke's at work.

I have had the privilege of being the PinC for only just over a year, and I have been graciously infected by this angel, drawn into the kaupapa which is the very essence of mutuality and love which at its very best is St Luke's in the city. And it is through that time that I have truly experienced the work of the Holy Spirit, the angel of St Luke's amongst these people bringing them to a point where they can as a parish give their life for a new venture with God.

The St Luke's Inner city Chaplaincy, with its focus on 'touching the sacred' in life the city with people of all faiths and none, the association with the cathedral as the heart and soul of our city and its contemplative heartbeat, the commitment to ongoing support for the marginalised people we have sought to serve, the desire for our precious church site to be used in due course for social, community purposes. Here is a legacy, here is a new life. Here is a model of future church which we can offer to others to think about in the way they are stewarding the resources that they have and hold. Tomorrow there is a death. But this is not the end.

So tomorrow the parish is dissolved. It is not what we wanted but circumstances largely beyond our control have brought us through the grace of God to some radical and adventurous decisions. We have truly felt the hand of God guiding us. It seems to me it is a reflection of the angel of St Luke's

The decisions this feisty group of parishioners have made in the way of those who have gone before them are brave and spirit filled. David Moore in a poem he offered to us last Sunday written by David Whyte quotes 'Sometimes with the bones of the black sticks left when the fire has gone out someone has written something new in the ashes of your life'. St Luke's, you are not leaving as the light fades quickly now, you are arriving. These last 10 years, these last few months tell the story of the passion, death and resurrection into new life of this faith community. We may as individuals not be sure of the way ahead for us, but what we can be sure of is that God who has been our guide and sustainer up to now, will never leave us to face our future alone. So as we will pray shortly -For all that has been, thanks, for all that will be Yes.