

Do you remember last week, when Jesus proclaimed Peter as the rock on which the church would be built? And was given the keys to the kingdom of heaven? Well, how are the mighty fallen!

*Get thee behind me, Satan!* It is a harsh rebuke and it would have hurt Peter to the core. What had he done, what had he said to incur such wrath?

With the best of intention, he had stood in the way of God's plan for this Messiah. He had taken upon himself the judgement of what should happen.

And Jesus speaks plainly: *You are a stumbling-block to me; for you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.*

How often might we be guilty of the same, of letting our human instincts get in the way of the divine plan? It's not an easy call and I am sure that I am often guilty. Every day, we make a thousand decisions. How good are we at discerning what God would have us do?

First, we need to have a good sense of what is the divine plan, of what is God's will. How can we know? As I often say, listening prayer is the strategy that helps me most.

I love the opening line of Psalm 26. Test me, O Lord, in my integrity. In other words, look within to see if our feet are on an even path. Check and check again against what we hear the voice of God whispering.

This is our last Sunday among you. During Covid, as many of you will remember, we were called you help you through that challenge and came to know you and love you, albeit through the mysteries of online worship. So we were thrilled to close the circle and be present in the flesh to see if you are as lovely a people of God as we thought. And we have rejoiced to find it so. The congregations we have joined and the personal times we have been with you have not disappointed, those we knew and those we have come to know.

You will be aware that a locum can have nothing to do with the running of a chaplaincy and decisions that are made. We are not allowed to open the mail or attend meetings. So we know nothing about what goes on beneath the surface other than what we pick up as we sniff the breeze of your common life.

We know that you are in an interregnum. We understand what that might mean for you all, for the wardens and church council as you prepare for the next incumbent. It is serious and intense work and you all share in the discernment process.

And we have heard talk of Building Tomorrow. That, too, is critical. The church of God has its traditions and its patterns of being. These do not stand still. Long ago, we stopped worshipping in Latin. And while we love the cadence and the beauty of the 1662 Prayer Book, we have alongside it the more recent iterations of that same foundational work.

Change happens in response to a changing world and a church that only looks backward will not be paying much heed to building tomorrow. I know quite a lot of investment has gone into these discussions and I don't have a clue about where they stand at present.

But I would encourage you to keep asking the primary question: what is the tomorrow you are wishing to build? This is something that you can only answer yourselves after prayerful and fruitful deliberation, undertaken in a spirit of openness and trust.

And, of course, there is always talk about money. I said in my first week here that the church universal needs to pay its way in the world. And that needs money. There's nothing wrong with money as long as we in the church keep it in the spirit of the greater work of our mission. It is not an end in itself so much as a means to the end we seek.

That principle applies to all that we do in the community of faith. In our first week here, we were in conversation with one of the community leaders at Holy Trinity who said this: 'We must always keep in mind what we are here for'. It has stuck with me throughout these weeks.

Let me tell you an old, old preacher story you have surely heard before. I first heard it some 60 years ago.

Three workers are breaking stones by the side of the road. A passer-by asks the first what he is doing. 'I am breaking stones', he replies. The second man's answer is a little different. 'I am helping to build a cathedral'. The third responds with 'I am building the kingdom of God'.

They are each doing the same work but have a very different view on what they are doing it for.

It is the same with all we do in our church life. If we are short-sighted and cannot raise our eyes above the immediacy of the task, we risk losing sight of what our labours are designed to achieve.

If you like, the difference is what upsets Jesus and gets Peter into so much strife. Do we have a human view or a divine perspective on what we are doing in God's name?

You don't need prophetic vision to notice that Holy Trinity is a very busy place. There is enormous work being done, much of it unseen. Yet it is all directed towards the one end – the building of the kingdom of heaven in this place that we heard so much about in the parables of the kingdom weeks ago.

It is all important in the divine purpose. There are welcomers, people who wash the coffee cups, work in youth ministry. Some sing in the choir, work in committees or in administration. Others are ministers of the liturgy, intercessors, readers, chalice bearers, or care for the linens, prepare rosters, manage the finances or the insurance policies. Pastoral visitors, someone takes the cash to the bank and so on and so on.

And whether you are a warden, a member of the archdeaconry synod or put out the chairs for the children, none of it is more important than something else. You are all breaking rocks for the kingdom of God, here and beyond, always and everywhere. Never lose sight of that.

And it all involves plenty of donkey work, as we call it. There's nothing wrong with donkey work. It is central to what we do. Remember, it was the donkey who carried Jesus. Everything we do carries Jesus.

And we who are many, are one body, united in the work we share.

I was once appointed Headmaster to a school that was struggling. The strategic plan I inherited was very short, just two words. Avoid bankruptcy.

In all our planning and working out of the practical strategies required, we kept one thing in focus. All we did had to be consistent with the principles and purposes of the community. If we lost that view, we wandered.

In Proverbs we read 'Without vision, the people perish.'

And it is the same here. It is for you to imagine the vision, develop the strategies and work at them. Divine things, the purposes of God.

We shall drop in now and then from afar and shall pray for your vision and your work. And we will share with you in giving thanks, always and everywhere.