

Thought for the Day: 24-30 August 2020

by Forbes Mutch, Lay Leader of Worship

Monday - Buildings

Thank you, Geoff, for last week's Thoughts for the Day on a theme of castles. I, too, have always been fond of castles and fascinated by buildings in general.

When I was young, one of my favourite books was *A History of Architecture for Students, Craftsmen and Amateurs* by Sir Banister Fletcher, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects (1929-1931). My Dad was an architect, which is why it was on our bookshelves at home.

I loved this heavy tome for its detailed authority and for its 4,000 intricate pen-and-ink drawings that illustrated all kinds of architectural styles and buildings, from the great temples of Ancient Greece to the magnificent cathedrals of Medieval Europe, and much more.

As I grew up and became a Christian, I couldn't help comparing faith to a building. It's not an original idea; and the Bible is filled with the symbolism of buildings representing faith. Check out the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Nehemiah or Matthew's scriptural reference to Christ the cornerstone: *The stone which the builders rejected, this became the chief cornerstone* (Matthew 21. 42).

Like every building, faith needs a cornerstone and strong foundations; it needs protective walls, windows for enlightenment, a door for new ideas, a roof for shelter, and a sense of security inside. I think you know where this week's Thoughts for the Day are going.



*Loving Father, help us feel a peace
in the structure and security of our faith.*

Tuesday 25 August - Foundations

The Bible urges us to build our faith, not on sand but on rock: *The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock* (Matthew 7. 25).

You'd expect every building to have firm foundations. It's surprising, then, that many medieval cathedrals were built on unsuitable ground, with hardly any foundations. The footings of Salisbury Cathedral, for example, are only 28 inches deep (just over 70cm) and the great church was originally built on a barely drained swamp.

When the spire was added to Salisbury Cathedral in 1320, with its additional 6,500 tonnes of stone, slowly but surely the spire moved out of alignment with the nave and the cathedral began to sink into the ground.

But it didn't topple over.

Sometimes God does that - He confounds apparent good sense and allows the unpredictable to succeed. Like many early cathedrals, the designers and stone masons of Salisbury Cathedral worked on the principle that God was on their side and the great weight of stone would keep their structure safe.

A heavyweight faith can overcome all sorts of obstacles.

Lord, by faith, I gaze up to the spire and know that everything that's good in this world is through your creation.



Wednesday 26 August - Walls

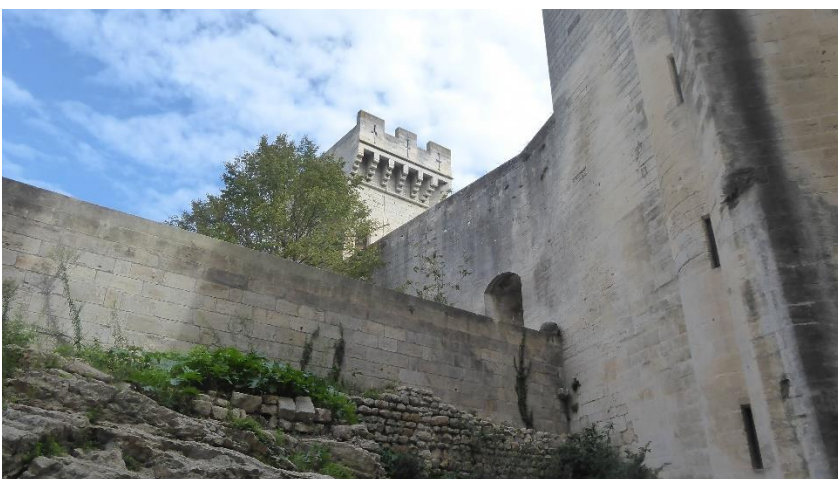
We are currently looking after a friend's cocker spaniel, and one behaviour that I've noticed about this confident canine is that she likes to sleep with her back to a wall (she also likes to sleep on our sofa, but that's another matter).

Most animals and humans feel safer surrounded by the security of walls - as long as there's an easy exit when it's needed. Rabbits like burrows; bears like caves, horses like stables and birds like nests.

Most humans (although not all) choose to live within the precinct of protective walls. These are usually made of brick or stone, but they could be constructed from wood, straw, canvas, animal skin or even ice. The principle is the same, however - we feel protected in a room that shelters us from predators and the elements (once again, the caveat to this is that we can escape if we need to).

As well as the physical, most of us also live surrounded by spiritual, emotional, mental and abstract walls.

The walls of our health, our relationships, our careers and even our faith are fragile and can seemingly crumble to dust at times. But I'm confident from personal experience that God is always on hand to provide the materials for repair. We just need to take a fresh look at the architect's plans to see where, and how, new protective securities can be built.



Lord, may the walls of our lives be always protected, repaired and rebuilt by your love.

Thursday 27 August - Windows

With some exceptions, most buildings need light inside. The obvious provision of illumination is daylight, usually penetrating the rooms through holes in the walls. We call these holes windows.

According to Sir Banister Fletcher (see Monday's TFTD), in early civilisations, many homes were built around a courtyard, with the windows facing inwards. Any windows facing outwards were wide enough to accommodate a bow, but too narrow a target for any enemy arrows.

Once history began to calm down and times became less troubled; once glass was invented, windows developed into features of decoration. European churches and cathedrals display some of the grandest examples of decorated windows, usually depicting famous scenes from the Gospels for a congregation that was largely illiterate at the time.

My favourite stained-glass windows are in Antoni Gaudí's Basílica de la Sagrada Família in Barcelona. Here, a myriad assembly of different windows let coloured light shift and shimmy across the interior of the cathedral, creating a kaleidoscope of shapes and colour that you wouldn't expect to see in a church. On the right day, it's amazing.

We all need light in our faith. We need illumination to highlight aspects of God's world that we haven't seen before. We need brightness to see the new things that are constantly appearing. We need windows for our belief.

*Lord God, let your light brighten
our closed-in spaces
and help us see the beauty
of what you have created in our lives.*



Friday 28 August - Doors

Historically, the door to a building would be functional; a sturdy obstacle to prevent unwanted visitors entering. As civilisation and architecture developed, so doors became more ornate, being less of a barrier and more of a decorative feature, inviting entrance.

The Bible tells us that the doors of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem were intricate: "All the entrances and doorposts had squared frames, and opposite, facing each other, three times" (1 Kings 7. 5).

During the 18th and 19th Centuries in Europe, doors to the homes of rich merchants became symbols of social status, with pillars and porticos to demonstrate wealth.

One of the most famous doors in Britain is the entrance to No 10 Downing Street. It is such an important symbol throughout the world of stable governance that there are actually two identical doors, which are alternated approximately every two years to be polished and repainted.

Doors are important in our faith. Open, they allow new ideas and God's vision to enter our lives. Closed, they prevent uninvited distractions from clouding our world. The trick (and the difficulty) is to know when the doors to our faith should be thrown open to welcome Christ into the heart of our dwelling, or when to slam the door shut on an unwanted predator.



Loving Father, be the key to our faith and unlock all the doors to your love.

Saturday 29 August - The roof

Put the word 'roof' into an Internet search engine and (after the advertisements for tilers and local building merchants) you will discover that a roof is 'the top covering of a building, providing protection against rain, snow, sunlight, extremes of temperature and wind; it is part of the envelope of the building'.

In many ways, the roof of a building is the most important part of the construction. Anyone who has lost a few tiles in a gale will tell you what havoc a leaky roof can cause.

Does faith have a roof? It's a good question.

At some point in Jesus' ministry, he had a house. Mark (2. 1-12) tells us that Jesus was preaching 'at home' and there were so many people there that latecomers couldn't get in. Unable to use the door, four friends, who were carrying a paralytic man on a mat to Jesus for healing, found their way blocked and so they dug a hole in Jesus' roof and lowered their friend into the room below. It's a dramatic story.

Jesus saw the faith of the four friends, forgave the paralytic man's sins, and healed him. In faith, we sometimes have to 'push the envelope' and raise the roof of our expectations.

*Lord, what protects us
can sometimes hold us back.
Give us courage to look beyond the
ceiling.*



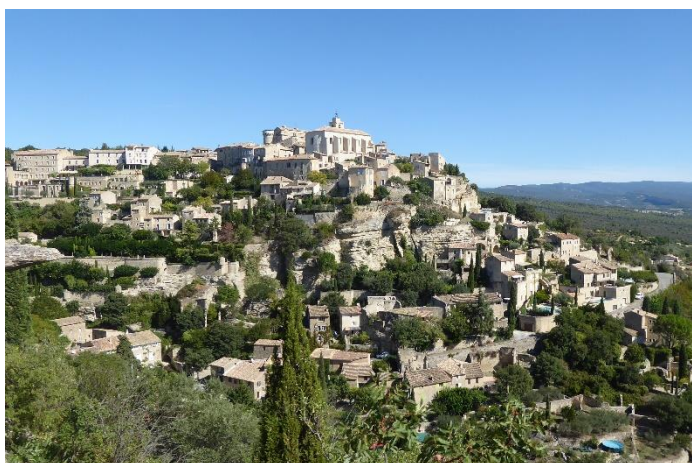
Sunday 30 August - House of Faith

So, there we have it - a complete building; foundations to secure us, walls to protect us, windows to enlighten us, doors to admit new ideas and a roof to shelter us. Sound familiar?

Our personal building of faith will have all these constructs. And within the walls will be many rooms - rooms of love, rooms of grace, rooms of energy, rooms for rest, rooms for recovery; workshops, kitchens, places to wash away the grime, places to find peace.

If your lifetime is anything like mine, you will spend different amounts of time in different rooms as you journey through your house of faith. Sometimes, you may want to alter or change a particular room; knock a few walls down, put up partitions, brighten your favourite room with a fresh coat of paint.

And another thing - your house of faith is on a vast estate. You will be living alongside neighbours with similar dwelling places, you'll be part of a community. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians (2. 19), when you are in the world of Christ, *'You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and members of the household of God'*.



*Father, help us appreciate that,
when we live in faith,
we are part of a wide community
of love.*