

ITNOTFAOTSAOTHS.A.

*Go and tell that fox for me, 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will finish my work.'*

This is not gentle Jesus. This is Jesus in the mood for a fight, Jesus doing his work and not willing to be diverted by anyone. Jesus is on his mission and heaven help, literally, anyone who gets in the way. We in this parish are engaged on a mission - a mission to cast out the demons of hate, darkness and despair and cure the illnesses of loneliness, hopelessness and fear from which so many suffer. It's a mission to welcome and to engage, a mission to bring people in and change them: change them into new creations God wants them to be. To energise ourselves to go on this mission, to do this work, we come here to the powerhouse of prayer, the charging station of salvation. In a world of wi-fi and cordless charging, this is the ultimate - no landline connections here, just the wireless and password free potential of being heard by God, no interference, no poor signal worries.

Church buildings are a vital part of our mission - they are the places where the Christian life begins in baptism, and where for many it ends with the last religious rites the church on earth can offer. We come here to be joined together and to be prepared to be sent out to live the Good News. It's the place we come to for music and refreshment, talk and silence, company and solitude. Churches are the ultimate multi-purpose space because they have so much potential. Churches can host everything from coffee mornings to fashion shows, Post Offices and PCSOs. Above all this, they are a place for a real and living and lasting encounter with God.

Buildings are more than containers. Almost everything we do here could be done somewhere else, and might even be more comfortable too, so why do we come here?

When we visit friends or relatives we go to their homes, we follow the customs and rituals they set down. We know that at Aunty Sue's we take our shoes off, while at Grandma's it doesn't matter. We know that some folk use the dining room while others entertain in the kitchen. Some folk will get out the best for us, while others won't because of the unfortunate Christmas incident of 1995 which reduced the Spode tea service to 5 cups instead of 6. We may even channel Hyacinth Bucket, sorry Bouquet, and tell people that we won't give them anything nice because they can't be trusted...

A house, a flat, a church, is not just a structure, not just a container for human activity. A house, a flat, a church is only really functioning when it becomes a home. For 900 years and more this place has been God's home in Abbots Langley. Not the only place God is of course, but the particular place where we come to meet God in the rituals of our family and friends. For 900 years, folk have come to this vast, sometimes chilly, often not entirely practical place and have felt at home with their host, who comes to meet them in bread and wine, word and spirit.

The contents of this human container speak of what it is for. There's a table at which all are fed and blessed, there is space for all, and musical instruments to lead us when we sing our family songs. There are lights and books, radiators and teacups - God who is host here offers spiritual and physical refreshment. So our extension, like this building is vital to our mission. We need a meeting and social space to welcome people properly, we need a kitchen to refresh the body so that the soul can be open for refreshment too. We need loos, not just for reasons that are entirely obvious, but because those facilities too will help us to welcome properly. How many of us in 2016 would think it OK to welcome people to our homes and then tell them the loo is 100 yards away in a different building? We need proper access for all those who arrive on wheels and a place for babies to be changed physically before they come to the waters of baptism to be changed spiritually. Like every home we

need more cupboards into which to sling things which come in handy once a year. We need this building so God's mission and welcome here can be the best it can be.

You will know that the curate is allergic to strenuous physical activity. And yet, on a sunny July day last year I found myself hurtling towards the earth strapped to a complete stranger, with only a silk handkerchief and some string to prevent me ruining part of the Cambridgeshire countryside. To the disbelief of those who love me, I jumped from a perfectly operational aeroplane to raise money for this parish. And what is even more terrifying is that with Jo and Claire I was pleased to do it - not because I like tempting God, but because I believe in the mission of God in this place, to cast out wicked things and to gather people to the light that sustains all the world, the light which inspired folk to build here all those years ago and which has inspired generations of men and women to keep it where it is. The light that burns in this home tells the world that God is here, living among us, as in Christ he lived among us in flesh and blood.

Let me say this quite clearly: you may not feel you need new facilities here, but God does need them - this is a sermon with handouts and so there are letters for you all explaining how you can be a part of God's mission here. God will use what we build, physical and spiritual, to his glory and for our good. I'm aware there are many many calls on our generosity and many worthy causes we can support - this church raises thousands of pounds each year to support those less fortunate than ourselves, and God will always use his house in Abbots Langley to help others - this is his mission, the mission of Jesus in the world, this is our mission inspired by the Holy Spirit: to do our best for this community, to be a missionary force for welcome, hospitality, love and creativity.

Jesus says in the Gospel, *See, your house is left to you.* This house has been left to us to build not just to maintain, to use to welcome not just to tolerate. The vast majority of

the money for our extension was left us by a generous member of the family here. Here we come to pray and praise. Here we meet with the one who made it all, the one who longs to draw all the world to himself. Here we come because Jesus commanded us to break bread and share wine as his family and then to go out and proclaim his Good News.

I'm not asking you all to skydive, only this: pray for this place and the people drawn here. Thank God for the exciting ways he will use this home to his glory. Most of all, with whatever you can offer, with as much as you can offer, sign up and leave a gift in this house for the generations who will follow us, and who through your love, your generosity, your welcome and prayers will find warmth, refreshment, welcome, and maybe even relief, spiritual as well as physical.