

St Barnabas College: Evensong and Thanksgiving 2nd July 2017

I am grateful to the Warden for inviting me to preach on this day of celebration and thanksgiving. We have come together this evening to give thanks for the completion of the latest phase of the major renovation that the College has been undergoing and it is a privilege for me to stand before you as your Visitor. I have tried to give meaning to the role of being Visitor by doing precisely what the word implies, visiting the College regularly; but I realise today has a special quality about it.

As we are all aware, some acutely, the work has been concentrated on the eastern section of the main College building as well as the whole of the central block, including the Chapel and kitchens, all of which has been re-roofed. Extensive restorations and improvements have taken place. The historic character has been sensitively retained, due honour being paid to the craftsmanship of the original stone and brick which has been restored. Beneath the surface, modern, environmentally friendly structures and systems have been introduced so that new technology will reduce the cost of running the building and make it yet more comfortable. The oldest buildings in the College are now fully up to the needs of the twenty-first century.

To make this happen has called for organisational abilities, along with great skill from the many different building specialists who have contributed to the work, and great generosity from the donors who have supported the enterprise purposefully. The Appeal, to which the Dean of Westminster kindly lent his beaming countenance, has drawn in contributions from many different quarters. Particularly substantial

sums were received from the Homes and Communities Agency, the Garfield Weston Foundation with additional help from the Almshouses Association. Many people in different ways have made contributions, all gratefully received, all valued by God. If I read the College web site correctly, for example, one of the fundraising assistants here, Vicky Jones, went not just the extra mile but considerably beyond that by undertaking a sponsored freefall from 15,000 feet!

The works that have now been completed are a great lake of energy fed by many small and larger streams of generosity and skill. Some of the contractors and donors involved are here tonight: I should like to express gratitude on behalf of the Church and Diocese as well as all who have been blessed by what you have done. You have left an enduring legacy that will be serviceable to many generations to come.

I understand that there will now be a pause for breath before the cycle of planning, fundraising and works begins again, as there are some small but important works that need to be done quite soon; and then, perhaps after another pause for celebration and recuperation, there will be a final push to refurbish the East range. So we may, God willing, look forward to at least two more celebratory Evensongs on a similar theme!

Solomon, in dedicating the Temple, said: 'Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built.' I wonder if some of you, in the silence of this Chapel, have ever found yourselves thinking: 'Thank God that God is larger than this College of St Barnabas, larger - thank God - than the Church of England, larger than anything of our own imagining or comprehension. I, for one, am

immeasurably thankful that I exercise my ministry as Bishop in a Church which claims to be only one part of the one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, for this is of the essence of Anglican identity and spirituality.

That sense of the greater whole of the loving purposes of God is worthy of our deepest reflection. It is important not just for our spiritual health and wellbeing, it is important because it leads us to a deeper understanding of God's covenant with us. Solomon celebrates in this passage the God who keeps covenant with his people and is faithful to his promises. In his new house, where his name will be known and found, God himself will meet with his people, his presence will be among them, and the people will make their prayers to the Lord, whatever may be their need. And so my brothers and sisters as we give thanks this evening for the very good works which have demonstrated great skill and generosity and helped to equip this College for a bright future, it is my hope that we shall ask the Lord to enlarge our vision and sympathies likewise. May we dare to put our trust in Him alone, the One who has already declared his loving purposes to us, the One who helps us in nothing to be anxious, the One who gives us sufficient grace and strength and nourishment for the journey.

Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built! Have regard to your servant's prayer and his plea, O Lord my God, heeding the cry and the prayer that your servant prays to you today. (1 Kings 8. 27,28)