

We Shall Be Like Him

All Saints Elland

Blessing of the Canon Winter Centre

Sunday 30 October 2011

No distance from Land's End in south west Cornwall is a unique auditorium, if you can call it that! It is a theatre – (almost like an amphitheatre) – cut out of the cliffs looking out into the Atlantic Ocean. This unique dramatic stage, the Minack Theatre, is remarkable for the backdrop it offers. I've seen two plays there – some Shakespeare and also Anouilh – each time it was breathtaking – the ocean as the setting meant that each play painted an extraordinary vision. The sea can have a transforming impact.

Now George Fellows Prynne, who designed this stunning building, was born and brought up first in Plymouth, and then later in Portsmouth, where he attended the Eastman's Royal Naval Academy. He would never have been to the Minack Theatre – it was not completed until after his death. But both Portsmouth and Plymouth, with their marine landscapes offered a breadth of vision that may have been part of what inspired Prynne's creative power. The other source of vision will have been his father, who was himself a priest. Today's three readings were familiar to them both and they are rich in their symbolism and sense of vision. His feeling for vistas inside and outside church buildings was remarkable.

Of course, Prynne would have had no opportunity to spread his wings had not Ernest Winter had the energy and foresight to have the initial vision for All Saints. Ernest Winter, who became the Vicar of Elland in 1893, was passionate about Church Extension. Today we might call this evangelism. The Church of England had been slow to respond to the industrial revolution. Cities and other urban centres had grown apace. West Yorkshire was a classical example of this. How would the gospel be preached as houses were built, row upon row, without a Church to serve them?

Winter, then, saw what all our readings each tell us. In the letter of John, we are told that we shall be like Jesus, like our Lord, but it does not yet appear what we shall be. Proclaiming the gospel offers us a vision – it calls us to fashion our lives after the pattern of Jesus. Today's feast reminds us of the universal call to holiness; it reminds us that God can fashion ordinary men and women, like us, into his image. The pattern lived by Jesus is spelt out with great beauty, great clarity and great power in our gospel. The Beatitudes offer a vision of how we are called to live in holiness. We are called to be *holy* as the 'Lord our God is holy.' Holy here could be translated as *blessed*, as in each Beatitude.

So holiness and blessedness are rooted in a pattern of Christian virtues. 'Holy or blessed are the *meek* that is the *humble*, for they shall inherit the earth..... Blessed are the *peacemakers* for they shall be called the children of God..... Blessed or holy are the *pure in heart*, for they shall see God.'

Here is a vision, a backdrop that sets before us a pattern for all our lives. Both Ernest Winter and George Prynne were keen to enshrine that vision in a great transcendent space. Such a space would take people out of themselves and point them toward the God in whose holiness and blessedness we are all called to be fashioned. The height of the building, the splendid breadth and the stunning screen – Prynne was renowned for his screens – all point us outside ourselves toward God. We are offered the possibility of living transformed lives.

But how does this actually affect the *practicalities of daily life*? Perhaps both Winter and Prynne were still more visionary than they themselves realised. For caught beneath this great building - rather like John Loughborough Pearson's beautiful addition to our Cathedral – is another marvellous space. It was a

latent or dormant space, waiting to be used at some point in a visionary way. Now that too has been transformed for the glory of God. That is now the Canon Winter Centre.

In these rooms now transformed, a continuation of Winter's and Prynne's joint vision will go forward. The work of proclaiming the gospel – in study groups, lectures and seminars will happen. Socially there will be space for the Church community to celebrate. But there too is the possibility of serving better the wider community – living out the pattern of Jesus himself.

There is something particularly remarkable about a latent vision conceived more than 100 years ago, giving birth to something as imaginative as this vision 110 years on. It is even more inspiring when one sees the vision effectively being part of one integrated whole – manifestly rooted in the gospel. It is encouraging too that Winter described his colleague George Prynne as 'as good a churchman as he is an architect.' The pattern of life lived in Jesus Christ has fashioned both their lives as it has fashioned the lives of the countless men and women we recall today. Inspired by the prayers of the saints that pattern of life lived in Jesus promises to shape our lives into the future, just as it has for those before us.

I began with that dramatic backdrop of the Atlantic in Cornwall. I conclude with this startling vision here in this upper church. For, it is the worship in this place that stands as the foundation to the great work that will now take off in the Canon Winter Centre.

Amen

READINGS

Revelation 7: 9-end

I John 3: 1-3

Matthew 5: 1-12

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