

## Choosing a Cornerstone

### St Mary Magdalene Lundwood

Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2007

It really is a mixed blessing for me to be here today. First of all, today, October 28<sup>th</sup> was my mum's birthday. She died seven years ago, but I still miss her for lots of reasons. One of her great strengths was to be hopeful and to make you feel safe. If things were tricky then my mum was just the person to have there with you. I can't quite explain why – she just made you feel secure.

Now this is interesting because she was born, of course, on this day, which is the feast of St Simon and Jude. St Jude is always known as the 'patron saint of lost causes'. That's why I said it is a mixed blessing for you to have me here today! You don't need to be mixed up in any lost causes – certainly not after the episode with the church hall and the fire.

Anyway let's go back to my mum for a moment longer. Alongside lots of humour and laughter, she'd generally have had lots of encouraging words to say. Encouragement at Lundwood is crucial now, for you stand at a really exciting point. Looking back over the past three years amazing things have happened. Father James is now well established; television made you all famous – and generally in a very good way; the turnaround team gave more hope.

You are now a lively Christian community – a thriving church. Even the burning bitumen of the Church hall roof can now offer new hope. But what do our readings tell us in all this? What are they about?

Well they seem to be all about stone! First we hear of cornerstones, rocks, which make people stumble, then living stones. Then, in Luke's Gospel, Jesus talks about construction and building. Build on rock or stone, he says, and then the structure will be solid and last. Now, all of this is perfect stuff as we look forward to the transformation of this building. It gives us a vision for the future. It tells of a gleaming new centre for the whole community here at Lundwood.

But as well as all those references to stone, the readings are really all about God. They are about what God has done and what God will do. First they are about what God has done in Jesus. God has come amongst us. More than that though, in Jesus God transforms our hope. Jesus tells us in that gospel:

'Everyone who comes to me, hears my words and does them is like someone who builds a house on rock.'

The first reading takes us on from there. It is one of the most hopeful and inspiring readings in the New Testament. It points us sharply forward. Listen again:

'Come to him, that living stone...and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house'.

So we are challenged, but we are also given an unquestionable hope, for moments later, we hear these splendid words:

'You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people. Once you were no people but now you are God's people'.

It was stirring stuff in its day, but it challenges *us* all too. For in the midst of it all, as God's own people, as a royal priesthood, it says that:

‘We are to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light’.

As a community, despite fires, rising damp, failing roofs – and even a lack of response early on - remarkable grace has been outpoured by God here. For not only has your community grown and been transformed, it is also giving others inspiration and hope. It has even helped the senior staff of the diocese to find new ways of encouraging other churches who have their struggles.

So God has, through his grace, given so much here in this place. You too have worked with God’s grace and today feels rather like standing on the launch pad for the next stage of the journey. One of the encouraging reminders to you is just across the way. I mean, of course, the remains of Monk Bretton priory. Here, through that ancient priory, you have evidence of the gospel proclaimed for more years than almost anywhere else in this part of Yorkshire. So even those ruins are living stones, reminders of God’s never-failing grace. They still tell of the never failing gospel, even for us, for the whole community and even for tourists and passers by.

As you prepare to build anew, remember, in your hearts, the words of that glorious reading: You are ‘to declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’

Godspeed then to all of you, for the God of our Lord Jesus Christ will be with you as you look ahead in him.

Amen

#### READINGS

I Peter 2:1-9

Luke 6: 43-49

For more information about St Mary Magdalene Lundwood got to [www.churchlite.co.uk](http://www.churchlite.co.uk).

For information about the Priest Idol television series Stephen refers go to [www.wakefield.anglican.org/priestidol](http://www.wakefield.anglican.org/priestidol)