

Stewardship Sunday 3/4 – Theme: Worship

Address by PCC Member, Ruth Gibbs, at Evensong

Good evening, I'm Ruth and I have been a member of St Bartholomew's for over 21 years. I am a sidesman and also a member of the PCC. I've been asked to talk about stewardship, particularly within the context of worship at St Bartholomew the Great and the Less.

First of all, we have to think about what we mean by worship as it can be defined in so many ways. Worship is expressed through all of us as a congregation singing hymns of praise to God; it is the inspirational and beautiful singing of the choir and wonderful playing of the organist; it is manifest in our adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; an integral part of the liturgy but worship can be defined even more broadly than this. The Bible teaches us that any action carried out the praise and glory of God is an act of worship. So, the sidesman giving out hymn books; those who provide refreshments after the services; those church members and staff who look after the vestments, clean the church arrange the flowers, carry out administrative tasks: each and every act performed in the service and to the glory of God is an act of worship.

And once we see worship in the broadest terms, sometimes, we can make mistake of dismissing the more esoteric aspects of worship as non-essential. We can see how the ministry of church community and service have a demonstrably beneficial effect for ourselves and others. We even find prayer more straightforward to define as efficacious as we are used to saying thank you, asking for things, talking about our worries and our concerns for other people. These are things we do on a daily basis so when we transpose them into prayer the step is not so great. But worship when it takes the form of singing; active listening to the choir; the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament do these actions really have any practical value?

The answer is a heartfelt yes. The value of worship is the fact that it nourishes us spiritually. True worship is about creating the right relationship between ourselves and the God in whom we move and live and have our being. It is about expressing heartfelt devotion to the God who created us and the world; sustains us and the world and loves us and the world so much that he died for us. And that is why the St Bartholomew churches are so important. Every time I step into either church, but especially the Great, I have a sense of entering a building where worship has taken place for many centuries and continues to be offered daily to God. I have a sense of being surrounded by a cloud of witnesses of ordinary everyday people who knew that to worship God was the starting point for understanding the meaning and purpose of life as revealed through Christ his Son. And this is why our stewardship and giving need to extend to supporting the music, the liturgy and the essence and form of our services which are at the heart of our worship.

For it is as a worshipping community that we, the whole congregation, can be united in expressing our love for God and in turn have the love of God channelled through us. And the world needs to see that love of God expressed and outpoured in the way we live. The world needs us and our witness in a way that perhaps we don't fully appreciate or believe. Just think of the atrocity in Manchester only a few days ago. Following on from that act of evil people are injured physically, mentally and

spiritually; people are grieving, people are bewildered, people are angry with so many unanswered questions and some people, mainly young, are dead. The world needs an explanation for attacks such as these and, as individual Christians, we may feel overwhelmed and unable to provide an adequate response. But as a worshipping community we can invite people to our church, to St Bartholomew the Great and the Less. We can say to the grieving and bewildered 'Come, come and meet God whose son, Jesus, was innocent of any crime and did nothing but good, but was killed as a result of evil and hatred. Come, come and meet his mother who watched her son die, his life tragically cut short. Come, come and meet his disciples who, when faced with the overwhelming force of brutal, self-serving secular and religious politics, felt totally powerless and ran away.' All this will resonate with those seeking to make sense of what happened in Manchester. But we can say so much more than this. We can go on to say 'Come, come and meet the same Jesus who rose from the dead and lives for evermore; Jesus whose resurrection shows that death is not the end. Meet Jesus who can support you in your anguish and give you back hope; who will wipe away your tears and bring you from darkness to light.

But, we cannot do this if we do not act as good stewards of the churches that have been entrusted to us. We cannot take people to a church whether it is St Bartholomew the Great or the Less which has ceased to exist. If we do not give of our time and money to ensure that the stones that form the walls remain one on top of the other, the sacred space contained within these walls which we call our church, will be lost. If we do not give of our money and time and skills to the worshipping community of St Bartholomew the Great and the Less there will be no community to serve and minister to those we seek to bring to meet the God whom we worship and adore. We have been entrusted with these wonderful churches to care for them as a blessing for ourselves and this generation and to bequeath them as a precious legacy to generations to come. We, the Christian community, need to be good stewards maintaining both the actual stones and ourselves the living stones of the churches of St Bartholomew. And to enable us to do this in a way that is pleasing to God and to his glory we need to be focused and grounded in Christ our cornerstone.