

Two impressive temples were destroyed on
Good Friday - can you name them?

The year is 1870 what can you see if you were standing on this very site, grassy meadows stretching across Ashton Vale and beyond. Where is the church? No-where. You have a vision thought of a place of worship, and in the meantime. But for now where is the church, if church is a building? As people build homes for the Wills employees and miners, you have in your heart and mind the need for a place of worship. The people bring faith and bible knowledge and together you are a body of people who want a permanent place to worship.

So you formulate a plan and build your tin tabernacle as a makeshift church and soon realise the need for a more permanent structure and so you approach the diocese with architect's plans to build along with a spire one of the largest suburban churches in Bristol.

Imagine now you're The Rector, you have priests curates and maids to serve you and

anyone who doesn't attend Sunday School as a child regularly doesn't get their attendance record signed and they don't get a job in the factory!

It's your first Sunday of the new impressive church building resplendent in fine red and grey stone. All the great and the good are assembled and everyone's terribly pleased with the design. Well not everyone, some don't like the windows, someone else grumbles that it's a bit cold, and another person preferred the tin hut especially because when it rained you couldn't hear the sermon! Still most people like the change and think it might be for the better.

There's an atmosphere of excitement and all eyes are on you.

As The Rector leaves the splendid new building, one of your churchwardens says to him,

*'Look, Teacher, what large stones
and what a large building!'*

How do you respond, by claiming to be able to predict the future. You announce that in seventy years' time, Good Friday 1941 to be precise,

'Do you see this great building? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.'

Two impressive temples were destroyed on Good Friday - can you name them? Well the first then on this site 1941 after repairs were made to bomb damage the previous year, so the church was hit again and destroyed.

What then was the other impressive temple to be destroyed on Good Friday? Jesus prophesied that if the temple were destroyed he would rebuild it again in three days. Jesus prophesied that his own destruction was necessary and predictable to the salvation of every soul everywhere. Jesus prophesied that the impressive temple of Jerusalem with its massive stones would be raised to the ground by the Romans - why?

Because a building had got in the way of the gospel, it had become the place of idolatrous building worship, where ritual and law, where excluding people for being female or Gentile or young or sick was the norm. The temple had become a den of robbers set up to trade in animal sacrifices which could only be paid for in temple currency and at a hugely corrupt exchange rate. The very house of God had been replaced by Jesus, the new temple, the place where people would encounter the true a living God

Do you remember the Samaritan woman anxious that only God could be worshipped in Jerusalem? Jesus helps her by saying,

John 4:21 Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem."

The real question is which temple impresses you more? A building or the living Messiah, Jesus Christ the Son of the Most High God.

It's a blessing from an accident in history that this building of STF is modern warm and light. In a climate of cold wet winters we need to gather together in a waterproof space that is preferably comfortable, but we must beware. If it weren't for a bomb we'd have a building the same age as St Adlhelm's

Time and again this last few weeks Jesus has urged us to count the cost of discipleship and allow nothing to get in the way of that calling. The rich young man refused to give up his possessions which for him had become his God. By contrast the poor widow gave all she had into the collection. The disciples dropped their fishing nets to become fishers of men and Jesus says that we must put him above family and possessions and everything else. This week's reading is a warning against buildings and false teachers, it's a warning about fabric not finance. We need these to run this building but it must never become more important than Jesus.

Between the years 1941 and 1953 where was St Francis church? Some people remember being married in St Aldhelms during those years, others remember services happening in the hall. Where will St F church be in 70 years' time, 700 years' time, and 7000 years' time? The church is the people, *ecclesia*, it's the biblical word for the people.

At DCC I asked what the main thing we are about is, we must keep the main thing the main thing. If an alien landed on North Street and went into the cake shop and asked you, 'What do you do?' how would you reply?

Next the alien goes into the chemists and asks, 'What do you do?' how would you reply. Then the alien wanders into the temporary Upfest store by the Co-op - what would you describe is the point? Err to look at pretty drawings on walls, drink designer beer and eat ostrich burgers?

Well you get the idea, he goes into the Tobacco Factory theatre - what's going on

there, and finally the Stadium - what's the point of that he asks?

But wait, there's another building he's missed you explain - no-one goes there much but I hear it's worth a visit just for the colourful window at the far end.

The alien goes into the church on a Wednesday and discovers people are trying to lose weight. Next he goes in on a Monday morning and discovers children and parents are playing with toys and drinking coffee - what's the point of that?

Curious to know more the alien turns up on a Sunday but gets told off for leaving his spaceship on the lawn. Someone hands him lots of bits of paper but mostly people don't like the fact that he's green and talk amongst themselves

Well the alien notices other people sitting down and so he watches the proceedings and stays after the music has ended and notices people chatting over drinks. So he asks for a drink but doesn't know about money and

feels embarrassed that he hasn't got any. Very few people talk to him and so soon he leaves and wonders what the purpose of the building is. He knows now about cakes and coffee, people trying not to eat too many cakes and graffiti, about drama and chasing a leather ball across some grass in front of lots of other people, in fact a few people working really hard while everybody just sits around criticising and commenting. But church - still none the wiser? Mind you it's an impressive building and the window is very pretty.

Since that tin tabernacle was first built, our society has seen seismic shifts, which leaves us two choices, adapt and thrive or refuse to change and die. Sometimes our life old ways and habits even buildings must cease for the seeds of growth to germinate.

*2) Insanity: doing the same thing
over and over again and expecting
different results.*

Attributed To Albert Einstein

We must respond to the changes that continue to happen all around us in order to

reach people for the kingdom. Jesus was only impressed by faith, not wealth, not power, not intelligence, but to those who would trust him give their lives for him - by that he was impressed. On the rock Peter the disciples Jesus said I will build my church.

We are temples of the Holy Spirit and when we allow Jesus to transform us into Christ like ambassadors of the kingdom of God, people will be impressed and the kingdom of God will grow.

We have to let go of the false idea that doing things because they've always been done that way is how to lead people to a living relationship with God. Before 1880 there was nothing here there were no impressive rituals no building just grass. Yet a body of people had a vision to build a place of worship in order that the faith that resided in each one of them might be expressed corporately in a building.

Buildings are there to serve believers, bricks and mortar provide a worship space but do not bring people to Jesus. Light and

atmosphere and music and candles are helpful to induce a mood in us, calm our nerves help us leave behind our frantic lives, but when the building becomes the Master, then God is not. If we think people will know Jesus because the building is impressive we have bought into false teaching which Jesus warns us against.

When Jesus says build my church, he means spiritual growth. The Hebrews reading insists,

²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

I am saddened whenever people threaten to leave a church if they don't get their own way. The hand cannot say to the eye I don't need you. If things aren't done how we like them then be

part of change or graciously accept that we bear with one another in love.

As it was once said, 'If you find the perfect church you'd better not join it because you'll ruin it'

We are the body of Christ, by one spirit we are all baptised into the one body, we meet in his name and share his peace.

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The question is this, which temple impresses you and which will bring people into a loving relationship with God and with one another. Do you look to stones for inspiration or to Jesus the cornerstone of eternal life and salvation?