

ST LUKE'S SILVER JUBILEE – 12TH MARCH 1978

THE SERMON preached by THE REV. DR. GEORGE HEMMING during the MORNING SERVICE.

“For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.” 1 Cor 1:1

For Christmas somebody gave me a calendar for 1978. Each month has a picture of a church in Canada. Here's one about the size of St Luke's and a couple more about our size or even smaller and I expect like us small and unimportant. But are they all that unimportant in God's scheme of things?

We began to build St Luke's on an unrecorded date in 1950 and I want to show you two more pictures. You could pass them round. This is the unofficial history of St Luke's of which there is only one printing. If you want to read it, and as the author of the book I think it is worth reading, I suggest you ask the Vicar for a loan of it. In the first picture you see the foundations being poured and in the second you see the blokes who did the job. There is one man missing in the second picture – Charles Stinson. It was found that we had dug the foundations 8ft short. I was prepared to settle for a Church 8ft and he had conned a few workers into helping him. So far as I know the only precedent in the Christian Calendar for a St Charles is Charles the Martyr – Charles 1 of England – a black letter day – but I think it was tidier to call the Church St Luke's rather than the Church of St Luke's and St Charles.

Once again, in spite of the frivolity there is a point I want to make. In God's economy the unimportant things are important. Here are two little pictures of some unimportant people and an unseemly rubble of unlikely decomposed coral stones. But with God-given determination and a spiritual vision of these rough stones, St Luke's was finally built.

Why then is a little unimportant Church so important? In my book the Church stands as a last rallying point in a Society which is very sick. I know very old men always say. But I see a very sick world with violence, failing values in Society, inflation and the rest. If you take away the sanction of an all seeing, all loving God and Father, society has nothing left. I believe we have already seen this state of affairs. That is why I see the Church as so important. I see no hope in politics, in nationalism, in law. I see hope only in Christ and that is why this little unimportant Church is, in the last resource so wildly important. We have greater resources than any other institution in society to bring about a new and better world and Heaven knows it could do with some improvement. “Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men.”

In the achievements of a Church we do not have to be concerned with the numbers who worship there. Providing we simply carry on faithfully with the job we can leave the rest to the Holy Spirit who requires not success but faithfulness. A great deal is being said today about the growth of unbelief. More recently we are reading about a resurgence of faith throughout the world and it is now predicted that we can expect

a great new blossoming of faith as men become disenchanted with everything else – science, technology, politics, law, medicine and so on, while making great advances have failed to improve man's life in the world. And that is why men are turning back to religion. But I like to look at actual facts. Like I said we must not worship numbers but God. Even so a view of the actual facts shows that the number of communicants in this Church has shown a gradual but steady growth from 859 communicants in the first year of our life to a record last year of more than 4,000. For this we thank God and we take courage "For the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

When we turn to the life and teachings of Jesus, we see again the power of the weakness of God and the foolishness of God. Jesus lived and taught in a period of history very like our own. It was a time of political ferment and racial and nationalistic tensions. A time of violence and a time of poverty existing alongside affluence. Into this world came Jesus teaching an entirely new and completely revolutionary concept of life. People were backing power and military strength, the power of Rome was manifest over wide areas of the known world and they had a strong sense of law. But Jesus taught that Love – not force, nor power, nor even the Law was the overriding concept in man's relations with his fellows. The power of the Roman armies in the scheme of things was of no significance alongside the individual's virtues of meekness, forgiveness, mercy, trust in God the Father. To many of His contemporaries He must have appeared a bit deluded, a bit foolish as indeed He appears to some people today. But in human relations He stood for the very things that matter – the things that abide. The Roman Empire has long since crumbled away and that is the inevitable end of all power politics and worldly wealth and materialism – but the teaching of Jesus has stood the test of time and it is for this teaching that this little Church stands. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

This age of ours, when the overall history comes to be written could well be in the books as the age of disillusionment. Most of the things that men have backed have gone sour. Looking back over my lifetime, so many things on which people pinned their hopes have gone wrong. I was a parish priest in the Depression of the 30's working in a poor urban parish and the whole prospect was grim. Now we are in another recession, worse in some ways because there is the added problem of inflation which widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots. The economists who were just coming into their own in the first depression were completely lost and in the event, the medicine they prescribed was just what the patient didn't need at the time. They are equally at a loss today as is evidenced by the varied remedies recommended. On this one current issue of inflation which I have pulled out of the hat to illustrate my point, I find more of relevance in the teaching of Jesus about greed and the love of my neighbour than I do in the theories of the economists and the politicians and the financier and the lawyers and the lot. And for my money, that goes for every other line of human thought or endeavour. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

Like I said I'm prepared to argue on the same lines about all our present problems – crime, violence, drugs, alcoholism, permissiveness, the growth of mental illness – you have it. My job brings me starkly in touch with all these things everyday of the

week. As I grow older I become more and more disillusioned with the posturing of the politicians, the antics of the academics, the tantrums of the Trade Unions, the fancies of the financiers and all the rest of the man made disciplines. I say that Jesus had more relevance in His teaching 2,000 years ago than the educationists, the politicians, the legal brains, the economists, the medical men and all the rest. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men."

That is why, for me, this little Church is so important, so relevant. In this Jubilee year, we thank God for His great blessings on His Church. We thank God and take courage. In spite of anything man can do and as one gets older one never ceases to wonder at the extraordinary things men will do, the Church will survive because this Church is not ours – it belongs to Christ. It is His Body and as Christ survived the Passion and Good Friday so His Mystical Body will survive our silliness, our pride and our arrogance. "Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men."