

ALL SAINTS WESTON

ROCK APPEAL NO. 2 SUNDAY

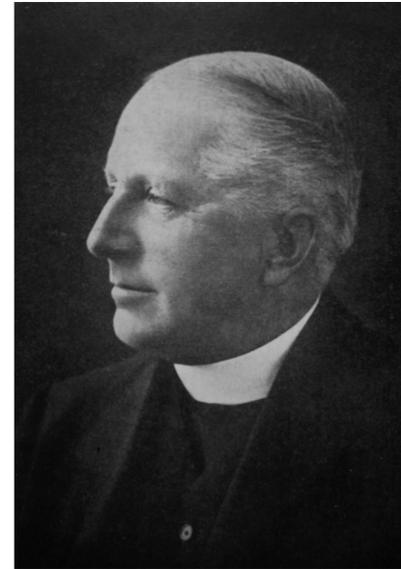
20 JANUARY 2022

WHOLEHEARTED AND COMMITTED

1 CHRONICLES 28-29

Today is a significant day in the life of All Saints. One of the most important in the last hundred years perhaps. We are launching our second appeal for the funds to start work on the ROCK Project. Later in the service you will all be invited to come forward and take an envelope explaining in detail the project, why we are doing it and more about the finances. You will also find in it a pledge card on which you are asked to say how much you can contribute to this project. You will be asked to return those pledge cards in two weeks' time. The PCC has already gone through this process and I'll let you know what they have given and pledged later in the talk. But first let me tell you a story which I have told you before about a former Rector of this church, the Revd Edward Hardcastle and who picked up the reins of a project to enlarge and beautify the church.

However early in his ministry here, he tells the story of how the Diocese asked him to hold a Mission to the village and to include in it a meeting on the evils of drink attending a Temperance Meeting. At the end of these meetings, there was very often a call for people to sign a pledge, rather like you will be asked to do later. However this was a pledge to abstain from drinking alcohol.



This is his own account of that meeting taken from his autobiography.

'Weston was much addicted to drink and it was therefore arranged to have a great temperance meeting in the schoolroom (now the Church Centre). Many came and listened with rapt attention to the speaker till he invited all present to take the pledge. Not a soul responded: so I, feeling something had to be done, stood up and said I

would take the pledge to be a Total Abstainer as long as I was vicar of Weston. Great enthusiasm! Then they all held up their hands – over a hundred of them – and took the pledge. Ahh... in a few months they had almost all broken it, and I only was left, to be a total abstainer for the next ten years!'

By the way I did a quick calculation, assuming that the members of All Saints consume the national average of alcohol, then abstaining for ten years would save £1,250,000 and if that were given away it would raise £1.5M! That's a sobering thought isn't it?

Well I said at the start that this is a significant day for us and for me it's been an eventful week. The most important event for me being the passing of my 95 year old mother-in-law at our home with us, as she would have wanted. A remarkable lady

with a remarkable story from the first part of her life. I bet you don't know too many teenagers who were part of Stalin's mass deportation of Polish people to Siberia and survived 3 years in the frozen wastes of Siberia before going on a journey by road, rail and sea to Persia, finally seeing out the war in a girls' school just up the road from where Jesus grew up in Nazareth while the rest of her family were bussed off to what was then Rhodesia.

Her journey was very different to the one we are on with the ROCK Project but ours has had and will continue to have its big challenges so let's see what we can take from this story in the life of David that we heard just now and let's fill in the background.

David, a man after God's heart, has been king of Israel and Judah for a good many years now and seen many ups and downs. He's an old man. Perhaps 71 (my age). Some years ago, he built a very grand palace for himself but there had been no substantial place of worship for God.

Towards the end of his reign there is a calamity in the form of a mysterious epidemic, brought on according to the writer of Chronicles and Kings by the vain actions of David. He was a far from perfect man or kind. Many thousands have died. Anyone recognise any parallels?

David in sackcloth and ashes pleads with God to spare the people and the angel of death pauses. The angel pauses at the threshing floor of Araunah. God prompts David to want to build an altar there so he asks Araunah if he can buy the piece of

land. Araunah says no need for you to buy it, I will give it to you. And David memorably replies

'I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing.'

Charles Spurgeon tells of receiving a wealthy man's invitation to come preach at his rural church to help the members raise funds to pay off a debt on the building. The man also told Spurgeon that he was free at any time to use his country house, his town house or his seaside home. Spurgeon wrote back, "Sell one of the places and pay the debt yourself."

Although David could basically use taxation to pay for the land and for the building, in other words he could use other people's money, he also determined to put his own wealth into the project.

And so David sets about planning the building of this Temple, although God has told him it will not be for him to be the actual builder or see its completion, because of the blood he has shed over the years. Like Moses who was not allowed to enter the promised land David won't see the fulfilment of his dream. But he is determined to press ahead, even at this difficult point in the life of the nation.

It reminds me a young man in his twenties called Sir Robert Shirley who lived at the time of great upheaval in England – the English Civil war and the execution of King Charles 1. Shirley was a staunch royalist and often found himself locked up in the Tower of London when Oliver Cromwell was in charge of the country. On one of the times he was not locked he started

work on the building of a private chapel for the estate in Leicestershire which was the family home. It was anything but a plain puritan church and he got in trouble for it, eventually falling ill and dying in the Tower of London at the age of 27.



If you visit the church now and it's cared for by the National Trust you can see this inscription over the doorway of the church. There it is. You can't read it from the picture but this is what it says.

In the year 1654 when all things were, throughout this nation, either demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley, Baronet, founded and built this church. He it is whose singular praise it is to have done the best things in the worst times, and to have hoped them in the most calamitous.

I don't think that we are living through the worst of times or the most calamitous of times but the times aren't easy and

therefore attempting what we are attempting is no small or insignificant undertaking.

Now David's task is made a little easier than ours for two reasons. Number one he is the king. He can make things happen. He can mobilise the resources of the nation and call in a lot of favours. We can get as far as a baronet (not me) helping us on this project but no higher! Secondly he has a hot line to God (or so he says) in terms of every detail of the construction.

He tells everyone: *'The hand of the Lord was upon me and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan.'* Then David gave his son Solomon all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the Lord and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things.

I have to admit that I do envy him. To have had those two advantages would have made life much simpler. We would have saved a lot of time (although I'm not sure how the planners would react to being told that the plans were ordered and designed by God) and they would have saved tens of thousands of pounds in fees – no need for architects, structural engineers, quantity surveyors and so on.

But that is not how it has been.

Let's look now at what David says to the people and in particular the qualities they will need to see the project through. You might think that in his charge or directions to the people and to his son, he would start with the practicalities but that is not where he starts. David knows that *'the task is great*

because this palatial structure is not for man but for God'. And so in his charge to Solomon he starts with these words:

And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the Lord searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. 'Serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind.'

In a way this is nothing to do with the building project that lies ahead of him. David is saying that before everything else God wants wholeheartedness, not half-heartedness or lukewarmness. Not here's a bit of my time, my thinking and a bit of who I am for God and the rest for other things. He wants



the whole of us, not bits of us with holes taken out like a swiss cheese.

It is an echo of the words of the first

commandment "Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind"

'Solomon serve the Lord with a willing mind, not a grudging, holding back frame of mind.' Of course wholeheartedness and a

willing mind do not come easy to us. We are distracted and attracted by many things. But following God is not or should not be like a hobby or something we do on a par with gardening, French classes and keeping fit. But a church of committed believers is more than a spiritual man or woman's working club or a book-reading circle or the Rotary Club. The ideal which we stretch for is a church which is first and foremost wholeheartedly for God, serving him with a willing mind and spirit, whatever form that service will take. Whether that service be teaching, administration, evangelism, hospitality, or generous giving and so on.

And when that serving brings a person or a church to a great endeavour then David is clear that other qualities are required.

- Strength
- Resilience
- Perseverance
- Fortitude
- The quality of not being discouraged
- Generosity

David says to Solomon and in effect to every believer who comes after him who is doing a great work.

Be strong and courageous, and do the work. Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord God, my God, is with you.

We are, of course, thinking particularly today and over the next two weeks about this daunting task called the ROCK Project but everything I am saying holds good for any project or

undertaking or duty or endeavour that God may have laid on our hearts or may be about to lay. And if you can't get excited and enthusiastic about ROCK or even feel it is the wrong thing at the wrong time, then take these words and apply them to some other thing in your life that God wants to see you active, fruitful and generous in.

In order for this young man Solomon to complete the task two other things are offered to him by David.

Firstly there is the assurance of God's continual presence with him, providing he continue to walk in God's ways. David tells him:

The Lord God is with you. He will not fail you or forsake you until all the work for the service of temple is finished

This is a constant assurance throughout scripture. Recently I have been much struck by the story in Mark of the disciples toiling in a storm on Lake Galilee when Jesus was not with them. Mark says *Jesus saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them.* Sometimes the ROCK Project has very much felt like that and it will feel like that again I am sure. But you have all known times in your lives when you have been straining at the oars, feeling that the wind is against you. But then into this situation comes Jesus and he reassures them with his presence and these words.

The second thing David assures Solomon of is the willing support of the people. He tells him. The priests and the levites – the specifically religious leaders of the people - are all ready

and lined up with you and also all those who work with their hands are lined up. People working together

Every man skilled in any craft will help you

The leaders and the people seem united in a common purpose behind Solomon.

That seems like a good point to share some good news with you as to what the Church Council has given and pledged to start us off on this next phase.

The PCC has given now and pledged for the future the sum of

£174,300

And when the Gift Aid is reclaimed on those gifts, the total will top £200,00 and will come to

£217,375

So Solomon has the commission, he has words of advice from his father, he is assured that God will not leave him or forsake him and he has a people ready to support him in the task. A great spiritual work needs all these things. And now they need the money to do the job. So the reading we had today ends with this great question from David.

Now who is willing to consecrate himself or herself today to the Lord?

It's one of the great questions of scripture. It stands alongside Gideon's challenge to the people *Choose this day which God you will service.*

In a moment we shall hear the words of that old song "Take my life and let it be, consecrated Lord to Thee'. It's a lovely song, but I have always found it somewhat hard to sing because it makes such great statements of commitment which I know I don't live up to.

Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold.

Well perhaps not entirely true for me.

Take myself, and I will be ever, only, all for thee,

Hmmmm.....

But just as the Temple was not built in a day and just as some great cathedrals took tens of years or even centuries to build. So it is with us, hopefully. Each day, each year a step nearer, something more of Christ built in our lives, some greater degree of consecration and a few less holes in our heart as we become nearer to being completely wholehearted in our service and or love for God.

May we be individuals and a church who are wholehearted, fully committed and consecrated to God.

Amen