



# Sunday Reflection

## Season of Lent

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 7 March 2021

## Lent 3

The readings today invite us to consider the God in whom we place our trust. God calls us into a living relationship with Jesus Christ. Faith may, at times, appear foolish or weak, but if it is flexible and alive, then it remains strong.

### Reflection for this week's Gospel

**"Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."**

John 2:19

#### **An Illustration to set the scene**

Church buildings tend to be rather solid structures, built from stone or brick.

Many of them have stood for hundreds of years, weathering storms and battles.

They look, from the outside, like safe and impregnable places. Thick towers can be seen from many miles away, giving the impression of firm faith and resolute certainty.

If you ever climb inside a church tower – especially if it houses a ring of bells – you may discover something different.

Church towers are built to sway.

The same is true of any high building structure: a little give is required.

Tall towers are not rigid at all; they have inbuilt elasticity to allow them to move.

In a high wind, or storm, or with heavy church bells swinging and ringing from the inside, a fixed and rigid structure would fall.

It is the inbuilt elasticity of a tower than prevents it from breaking up and falling down.

## **Looking at the teaching of the Gospel**

Jesus causes a stir when he overthrows the tables in the Temple and drives out the money-changers, but it is comments about the Temple that cause people to grow angry.

It was, ultimately, his claim that he could rebuild the Temple in three days and the implication that it might be destroyed that formed the basis of the charge on which he was tried and condemned (for example Mark 14:58).

The Temple was the symbol of faith, large, beautiful and strong, and by suggesting that it might be destroyed Jesus appeared to suggest that it was weak or transient.

Of course, the physical Temple was indeed destroyed some years after Jesus' death, but the very idea that it was possible to destroy it was too hard for the Jewish authorities to hear.

Instead, as John reminds us, the Temple to which Jesus was referring was his own body, which was destroyed and raised after three days. His disciples remembered this later. Jesus is not locating the focus of worship in a building but inviting his followers to a living relationship with God, which comes through the one who is the way, the truth and the life.

Those of us who love and care for our wonderful church buildings might feel a pang of anxiety about the idea of their being destroyed or falling down. Indeed, we spend a lot of our resources making sure that they do not.

But Jesus calls us to question where we put our trust, where we root our faith – and reminds us that, ultimately, we place our trust in a living relationship with him, and not with the bricks and stones.

## **How can we reflect on the application to our lives?**

Where do we put our trust?

In what do we find our solid ground when our faith is knocked by life events or shaken by our thoughts and emotions?

Firstly, we might remember that our faith grows from our living relationship with Christ, not our adherence to a set of rules, or our commitment to a set of doctrines, or even our attachment to a particular building.

Although commandments, doctrines and worship in beautiful buildings might enable that relationship, they are ways of assisting us, not ends in themselves. They change, fall down, are challenged or even destroyed – but our common calling to love and serve God remains solid.

Secondly, we should be unafraid to put our trust in something that appears weak, vague or foolish.

God, after all, demonstrates strength, wisdom and power in the cross and the death of Christ.

The God who was faithful by covenant to Moses and Paul and millions who have gone before us remains faithful to us. Today's post-communion prayer asks that God give us grace to withstand the challenges or the temptations of life.

Not strength, not resolve, not fortitude, but “grace”. Grace sounds much lighter of touch, more fluid and flexible and much more elastic than words like power or strength.

When the world sways, when we are beset by doubts or anxieties, in ourselves or in our church, we do not need strength or rigidity in our faith, but grace to trust in God, and faith to delight in a living – and even a changing – relationship.

**“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”**

John 2:19

Please share your response to this reflection to [Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](mailto:Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk) – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God’ spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst we cannot meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

**[www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk](http://www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk)**