**Bricks-structurally sound**

**Acts 4 v 5-12**

**Jn 10 v 11-18**

I am aware I am not speaking for everyone today but I would imagine that most of us come to a point in our life when we have to look for a new home. It might be when we leave our parents home, or if we meet someone and want to live together. Or it might be when we have children and feel we need more room. Or if we have a job change and have to leave our area. Nowadays people are much more likely to move to completely different parts of the country, which makes house searching another priority.

And when we look for a new home, it’s important that we are going to be safe there. So, we look carefully for cracks in the wall, damp in the corners and tiles in the roof.

I remember when we moved into my present home we only looked round once, and then were amused and astounded to find that the previous owners had painted around the furniture, so when a cabinet was moved, we had an outline of the cabinet on the wall!! Which looked delightful! But structurally the house was sound, and that’s what you want from a house, a place where you are safe, where the brickwork is sound.

 The reading from Acts refers to Jesus as a cornerstone. The cornerstone unites the two sides of an arch and holds it together. Without the cornerstone the building would collapse. So the building is dependent on the cornerstone. Peter is quoting from Psalm 118, and making the point that Jesus, who had been rejected by the Jewish council,

which was made up of groups like the Sanhedrin; has become the cornerstone of the church, the one who upholds it all and on who we all depend.

But if Jesus is the cornerstone of the church, then what does that make us? Well, I would like to suggest that we could see ourselves as the bricks. The fabric and finance team will probably groan at this, because they already spend so much of their time discussing brickwork, roofs and the fabric of the building, all essential stuff!! But I’d like to suggest that we should all see ourselves as the brickwork, as part of the structure. Bricks are made from clay, they are moulded into a shape which solidifies and is then laid by a bricklayer. We have been moulded by God, shaped and formed by him and placed in a structure upheld by Jesus.

And each brick is important. The reading in John reminds us of the Good Shepherd, who this church is named after, and how he loves every one of us so much he lays down his life for the sheep, defending them from wolves. Every sheep, to him, is important.

As is every brick. Imagine a building with bricks missing. Those bricks effect the overall structure. Without them, the building isn’t as strong. Without them a vital ingredient is missing. I know both of our churches have lost people who have worked tirelessly for church, but more than this; have added a humour, or a humanity or a kindness that we miss. And that effects the rest of us.

Every brick is important. No matter what it is that you bring to this church. Simply being you, changes the fabric of the building.

But buildings can’t maintain strength if the bricks don’t play their part in the building. We have many people in both churches who have worked, and still do work, extremely hard, giving a very great deal to their church. It’s the APCM today, and I know Phil is going to share some of the incredible work that has gone on. But, and I hope I don’t upset anyone by this, there are some who think being a Christian just means coming to church. There are some who let the same people do all the jobs. They say that 20% of people do 80% of the roles. Imagine if that was reversed. How much simpler and manageable it would be.

Because being a Christian means contributing. Now I know not everyone can contribute in a massive way. I wouldn’t suggest that somebody who can’t walk well, mends the roof!

But everybody can do something, even if it’s a little bit.

On a Wednesday we have a communion service here with a tiny number of people. And they all contribute. Trevor opens up and sets out the linen and lights the candles. Ann and Barbara make us all a very welcome drink for afterwards. Stuart brings jokes and stories to the group and teaches me how to advertise services on facebook and Veronica shares with me some of the pastoral work she is doing. And it’s the same on a Thursday morning at Christchurch, each person doing a little bit. And the end result is an intimate and sacred communion service followed by friendship and love.

It might only be a small thing, but its doing a little bit, the bit only you can do, that builds up the church. Each brick has to play its part, otherwise some parts of the fabric are under more stress than others.

I know people worry about being overloaded. They think, “if I say I can do that, the next thing I will be doing the lot.” And that happens sometimes and it shouldn’t. But this isn’t about doing what you can’t do. This is about doing what you can do. There is nothing wrong with saying, “I can do that, but not that.” I can’t cook. Nothing on this planet will ever make me become the cook Ed would want me to be! But, I hope, I can listen carefully to people, lead services, do funerals and other things.

And there’s always something that needs attention.

I remember thinking, when I wasn’t ordained and used to help in church, how great it would be to be a vicar, because then you would have all week to do everything. Yet, despite working 6 days and several evenings I still find there is so much to do, the job is never finished. But if we work as a body, if we contribute our bricks worth, then we will have a stronger structure that can house more people.

Because, imagine if we went even further than simply maintaining the structures. If we didn’t just remain as the structure that we are, but if we extended! Not by building a new kitchen or a gym! But by reaching out towards the community. Imagine if, by contributing, we could touch people who would otherwise never meet Jesus.

Because, by each doing a manageable act of kindness, we could be contributing to creating the kingdom of God. What manageable act could you do, do you think? How could you extend our building to others?

Well start with something that you can do.

Continue with the role that you are already doing.

*Its taking a brick and putting it in the wall.*

Bring your laughter and a listening ear to the Welcome Group or fellowship.

*Its taking a brick and putting it in the wall.*

Put posts or comments on the facebook page.

*Its taking a brick and putting it in the wall.*

Invite someone to one of the coffee mornings.

Join the pastoral team.

*Its taking a brick and putting it in the wall.*

Help with the once a month café church

*Its taking a brick and putting it in the wall.*

Assist with visual aids or sound.

*Its taking a brick and putting it in the wall.*

Contribute with ideas for family services.

*Its taking a brick and putting it in the wall.*

More bricks, more wall, more church, more space. More home. Amen.