

Sermon given by Revd. John Geyer at the celebration of the 75th anniversary of the church buildings of Weoley Hill United Reformed Church.

MY NAME WILL BE THERE

1 Kings 8 vv10-13, vv22-30;

Ephesians. 2 vv14-22;

Matthew 5 vv14-16

With real joy, Margaret and I have travelled all the way from the Kingdom of Fife to be with you today, and I must thank you for the great honour you have done me in inviting me to preach and open to you the Scriptures on this memorable occasion.

It seems like yesterday - how often have you used that expression as you get older? - it seems like only yesterday that we were celebrating the 50th anniversary of this building and yet, sure enough, it was 25 years ago, a quarter of a century, no less.

During that time, the buildings have been under the constant care of the Fabric Committee, and you have spent much of your time, freely and lovingly given, in preserving and improving them, and much of your money as well. Even so, it hasn't changed as much as you have.

The building has aged by a quarter of a century, but it stands here recognisably the same, a landmark of Weoley Hill and of the Bournville Village Trust. We, on the other hand, might be difficult to recognise after 25 years, and certainly we would be unrecognisable by someone who hadn't seen us for 75 years. 75 years ago many of us weren't even here - I was then one year old and did, I'm quite sure, look different from the way I look now. I didn't, for example, have a beard in those days.

As a congregation, you have changed in the past 25 years (let alone the past 75) not simply in looks but, for want of a better word, in composition. What I mean is that so many of the saints who worshipped with us in days gone past, are now beyond all change and worship unceasingly in the highest glory. It is difficult for me to stand here and not to see those 'faces loved long since and lost awhile', as that man from the Oratory said in his hymn.

And that brings us at once to the dilemma we are in today - especially the dilemma of the preacher - that we are here to celebrate the 75th anniversary of a building, not the 75th anniversary of a church, because we all know that a church is not a building, it is a living body, not stones - or even bricks - and mortar.

So strongly is this our belief in the Reformed tradition that we must ask at this point whether the building is of any importance at all. I well remember John Huxtable preaching at the opening of the new building of the then Congregational Church in Newmarket, where the horses race, at a time when money was scarce and the needs of society at home and abroad were great. He based what he had to say on the story of the woman who anointed Jesus from a bottle of very costly ointment and John Huxtable took as his text for the opening of the new building the words of the indignant disciples, '*Why this waste?*' (Matthew 26 vv6-13).