

Martin White. 7th Sept 2008.

Where we've come from & where we're going

Vision: September 2008

A long time ago I was in a church in Bracknell that was in the middle of a building project, building the Kerith Centre, which was a £4,000,000 building that seats 1000 people.

We prayed – early morning prayer meetings 5 days a week; we gave double tithes and offerings; and we saw God provide in amazing ways; we prayed that God would stop the rain through the winter of 1988 so they could finish putting the roof on – and had the driest winter on record ever; and we watched a beautiful building going up.

During the building project, there were open days when people walked around the site to see what was going on. I remember looking around a muddy field and hearing the architect describing the building and struggling to imagine what it would look like.

There was also a display of “artist’s impression” pictures to look at and the blueprints for the building.

I want to talk this morning about the Crown (we’re not starting an actual building project just yet!) and I want to do a site survey, and then I want to get some of the blueprints out and talk about what we are building.

So please forgive me if I don’t preach from the Bible, as we usually do; but for most of the rest of this year we’ll be looking at a major biblical topic, and then early next year we will be aiming to preach through a book of the New Testament.

But back to today and this Church building site, I want to start by looking quickly at the work so far and then we’ll look ahead at the building work that God is doing.

The site

Why we're here:

Bedford – my dream of Birmingham; God's idea

Handsworth is such a key location –

- Friendly
- Soho Road
- Asylum seekers
- Lozells Road – if you wanted to have a place of significance, this is it!
- Next door to the largest Gurudwara outside India
- Many nations

The foundations

(Foundations shape the building)

Dave Devenish – “If you want to plant a truly Prophetic Church – it will need to reflect the community it is in.”

Many successes & failures,

- Difficult times/ disappointments
- Exciting times – baptisms
- Progress (29+ nationalities have been or are part of the Crown!)

Jane Holland's word: Picture of the Building inspector (Jesus) coming to inspect the work and saying that the foundations are in the right place, but that a layer of bricks needed to go, and then the building would go up quickly.

We have prayed that God would do this work quickly and have seen some great 'bricks' leave, but we are full of faith that soon the building will go up – in God's way; on His Foundations; to His Plan

The architect's drawings

We had a loft conversion a year ago that took a long time. We were sitting in rubble & plaster dust and trying to imagine the finished room. This was an encouragement to us! “It is all worth it!”

I want to dream a bit now and imagine what the building is going to look like in 20 year's time.

- Welcoming people from many people groups – lots of visitors – amazed at the true unity and excitement of coming together to worship
- Worship = mixture of musical styles & cultures & languages, prayers from around the room in many languages shouting out praises to Jesus, & we'll feel completely at home with this.
- Preaching – this week in Kurdish with translation into several other languages
- Communion being served by different nationalities
- Large notice boards with maps and pictures of many people we have trained and sent out to different nations around the world (including the Crowes in Tajikistan, the Stojanovics in Serbia and the Quinteros' in Bolivia)
- Praying & hearing news from the many of these people we have sent out to different nations as well as people we have sent to plant churches across Birmingham and into different cities in the UK
- Genuine sense of being one church, rather than different groups of people – enjoying the bigger view of Jesus as Lord over the whole earth.
- (as it's September) Meeting & praying for our new team of people who have come to learn how to build multicultural churches
- Building – open, welcoming, relaxed , bright feeling with , “thin walls” between the church and the community, with lots of people coming in to English classes and for prayer each week & people who aren't Christians yet, feeling at home in the place. There would be a training centre where people would learn on the job to be
- People from outside of the Church (local authorities etc) will come in to see this phenomenon – God's 'multicoloured' wisdom being demonstrated.

I don't know if anyone here has been to anywhere like New York which has awe-inspiring buildings - I haven't; but I went to see a rugby match once at the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff; and as I walked into the stadium, the size and the occasion made me gasp. I feel a similar sense of excitement as I think about the Crown.

To think about these things without God is just a human idea that will fail. Birmingham – especially areas like Handsworth, has had so much money spent on it and so many projects start and then close down, that there is some cynicism whenever something new gets announced.

And I don't believe that this is just driven by ambition – I feel uncomfortable putting myself forward or 'selling my wares'

But Jesus is passionate about this city, and He has not forgotten it; why shouldn't God do something amazing that will really change this city?

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet,
till her righteousness shines out like the dawn,
her salvation like a blazing torch.

The nations will see your righteousness,
and all kings your glory;
you will be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.

You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD's hand,
a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

No longer will they call you Deserted,
or name your land Desolate.
But you will be called Hephzibah,
and your land Beulah;
for the LORD will take delight in you,
and your land will be married.

(Isaiah 62:1-4 NIV)

The reason we are called The Crown is because of this passage in Isaiah which talks about God restoring His City – Jerusalem, from a place of desolation to a thing of beauty.

As He does this (because it's His Work – He calls it by a new name) and restores the formerly desolate city, the nations look on and see God's Work.

And as well as being His Work; it is also for His glory. The point of the crown is that it is to reflect and demonstrate His splendour – the glory is His.

The next phase of building work

Over the last months, I believe that God has been speaking about working on our DNA; in other words, He wants to work on the small, hidden parts of what makes us who we are as a church. I believe that this will be a time of dealing with what's in our hearts, our attitudes, and the way we live out our faith.

But I believe, similar to Jane's word about the Building Inspector, once Jesus has done the work He intends to; once the DNA work is done, then what will follow is growth and reproduction. God is working in us in order to make what He has done here something that will be reproduced across other cities.

And this is often how He works – investing in and discipling the few in order to bless the many.

The supplies needed

- Leaders
- Workers
- Money
- (In the future) Building

Being part of the project

Although I wasn't in the Bracknell church with the big building for long (I was sent out to do a Year Team in Bedford) it was a huge privilege to be part of what was going on there – seeing the answers to prayer and living through such an exciting time.

And where I prayed and gave financially towards the building project, I still feel a sense of ownership and belonging. (I used to joke about which of the bricks my money had paid for!)

Some buildings have plaques or stones laid by people when they are built; I think we'll need to settle for being some of the "living stones that are being built into a spiritual house" (1 Peter 2:5). But I hope that you know what it is you are helping to build; and I hope you know that your names are written on it.