

Sermon Preached for the Trinity Church Centennial of its building

On April 19 of this year I received a letter from your rector asking me to be here today. I was thrilled. Trinity is home base for Linda and me. I was ordained a deacon here in June of 1979. On May 3, 1980, the Saturday before Easter V, I was made a priest by Bishop Weinhauer. I can still remember being pressed into this floor by the Bishop and the presbyters in attendance. In July of 1980 our first child, Ellen was born. Her birth with Downs Syndrome was traumatic for us and our home on Gracelyn Road in North Asheville was a very sad place. Linda and I often give thanks for this congregation. We would not have made it without Graham Butler-Nixon and you, a very loving, forgiving congregation. Our gratitude is deep and personal: Jack Tuton gave Ellen her first bottle. Ellen's baptism was truly a family affair in September of 1980. Coming home is a small, good thing for me.

The invitation to be with you was to mark the 100th anniversary of this building with its famous architects, Ralph Adams Cram and Bertrand Grosvenor Goodhue of the firm of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson with offices in Boston and New York. In 1913 this building was consecrated, replacing the building destroyed by fire in 1910. So, I began thinking about Bertrand Grosvenor Goodhue and Ralph Adams Cram and the architectural genius behind this masterpiece. Then on October 3, I received an email from the Rector: "Also, just so that you know, I've decided that this service is going to focus more on the theme, including hymns, etc., of All Saints, with the whole idea of those who have gone before who have made this community possible, and how we are part of the great cloud of witnesses, rather than going in the direction of "The House of God," "The Church's One Foundation," etc." I said OK! Perhaps we could do both I thought, as I read the lessons assigned for All Saints' Sunday.

It is well to note that we Episcopalians are a people of the Book. The lectionary does indeed shape our common life, it was so in 1913 and it is so in 2013. Virginia Seminary's dean with whom I work tells a story which reminds us of this truth. Three clergy persons were meeting because it had been announced that a meteorite was hurling toward planet earth and that all humankind would be obliterated on the following Tuesday. With the world ending, it was assumed that the churches would be full. The Baptist pastor asserted that he would take as his text John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have everlasting life." The Baptist pastor said I will then give an altar call and all will come forward and be saved. The Roman Catholic priest offered: I will preach from Matthew 16:18: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it." I will then be available for confession immediately after the service.

The Baptist asked the Episcopal priest what she would preach on. Quietly, the priest said: "I will preach on the lectionary readings assigned for the day." So it is. We are a people of the Book. We are living fully in this world and we are ever ready for the last trumpet to sound, for the Church Triumphant.

So, let us ponder the communion of the saints as the spiritual House of God. Just as nature and grace cannot be separated, so we believe that our spiritual heritage must have an incarnation, a physicality which hosts our interior, spiritual beings. This is the reason sacred spaces are so important. They are the sacramental sign, the outward and visible reality, of an inner, hidden life.

It was first in the 16th century when the death days of saints were referred to as their "birth- days." Saints' Days were heavenly birthdays. Why? "Because they (the Saints) looked upon those (their death days) as the true Days of their Nativity, wherein they were freed from the Pains and Sorrows of a troublesome World, placed out of the reach of Sin and Temptation, delivered from this Valley of Tears, these regions of death and misery; and born again unto the Joys and Happiness of an endless Life, an Inheritance incorruptible, that fadeth not away." (Robert Nelson) These words by Robert Nelson who wrote *A Companion for the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England* in 1704 are close to what St. Paul wrote about as our inheritance in Christ and our "love toward all the Saints." Indeed, by being one with a "great cloud of witnesses," we find our hope; we see the "riches of our glorious inheritance among the saints." The Communion of the Saints is a foretaste of the "immeasurable greatness of God's power for us who believe." The Saints of God are ever part of the Church—the very Body of Christ, the "fullness of him who fills all in all."

In hope and with "love toward the Saints," we believe that Bertrand Grosvenor Goodhue, Ralph Adams Cram, and Mary Elizabeth Tillinghast who created the stained glass and other artisans are one with the Saints in this great House of God. In our Liturgical Calendar, Cram is honored on December 16—a feast day which celebrates not only Cram but also Richard Upjohn and John LaFarge.

Many assume that Goodhue was the sole or principal architect of this majestic building. But history holds the secret. Could Goodhue's work have included Cram? Or since both were good Episcopalians was it both—a collaboration? Neither architect places this church building on a list of buildings he designed. Neither came to Asheville during the project. Indeed they trusted the on-site, supervisory architect, William Henry Lord. I want to believe that this building is a Goodhue/Cram creation—reflecting a brilliant business partnership which lasted for 25 years.

We know that the firm of Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson had a stormy relationship with the building committee and the vestry of Trinity Church Asheville. The letters

tell the story. As I read some of those letters, I realized that archives can be both friend and foe. In 1910, Trinity's church building burned. In 2010, Immanuel Chapel at Virginia Theological Seminary burned to the ground. For three years we have been working with Robert A.M. Stern Architects – Robert “Anything but Modern” Stern. He is the American architect without peer. I think I should look carefully at the constant emails between Stern and VTS!)

Cram, the son of a Unitarian clergyman, slipped away from his New England religious roots and became an Episcopalian at St. John the Evangelist in Boston. During an 1887 Christmas midnight mass in Rome, Cram had a dramatic conversion and became a dedicated, fervent Anglo-Catholic--a high church Anglican, a smells and bells Episcopalian! By the 1920's Cram was frequently mentioned in the press. The *New York Times* called him – and this is a quote: “one of the most prominent Episcopalian laymen in the country.” In 1926 Ralph Adams Cram appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine – a decade or so after he designed this church at the corner of Church and Aston streets.

In 1924 an early death ended Goodhue's amazing career. He designed the Church of the Intercession in New York as this building was being designed and built. Goodhue is buried in the Church of the Intercession, the one he considered his finest work. There is a saint-like statue of Goodhue in the Rockefeller Chapel at the University of Chicago. He holds a miniature of the Rockefeller Chapel in his hands.

Much of Goodhue's and Cram's work is an example of their commitment to Gothic Revival architecture. They saw the Renaissance as a regrettable detour for western culture. They were believers in all things Gothic--but they were also modernists of sorts who favored Art Deco designs. Under this fine hammer-beamed ceiling let us give thanks for Cram's devotion to God and Goodhue's genius and the temple which is made with hands. Like many thoughtful, generous Anglicans, they cultivated two senses – the theological and the aesthetic. On the feast day set aside for Cram and other artisans, we pray:

Gracious God, we thank you for the vision of Ralph Adams Cram, John LaFarge and Richard Upjohn, whose harmonious revival of the Gothic enriched our churches with a sacramental understanding of reality in the face of secular materialism; and we pray that we may honor your gifts of beauty of holiness given through them, for the glory of Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, in glory everlasting.

Let us give thanks for all the saints, and especially for the inspired vision of Bertrand Grosvenor Goodhue, Ralph Adams Cram, Mary Elizabeth Tillinghast and William Henry Lord and for those artisans known to God alone. Their gift of beauty to Trinity Church Asheville endures and for that our hearts are truly thankful.

The Rev. J. Barney Hawkins IV, Ph.D.
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