



Southwell Minster

Sunday 19th April 2026

Readings appointed for the Office: Haggai 1.13 – 2.9 & 1 Corinthians 3.10 - 17

Installation of the New Dean

In the Name of the Living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Alleluia!

On the 8th March, I preached my final sermon as Rector of St Marylebone – thankfully, a good twelve feet above contradiction, and very safe within Thomas “Victorian” Harris’s monumental marble pulpit; I’m not sure that Southwell Minster’s wooden pulpit, affords quite the same level of protection!

Although, overshadowed by G F Bodley’s sounding board (even in 1898 the roof wasn’t in terribly good nick) and underpinned by Saints Edwin, Ethelburga, Augustine, Paulinus and - certainly not least - by the Blessed Virgin Mary, herself, and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, I’m reassured that I’m in pretty safe hands!

In my last St Marylebone homily, I reminded the congregation that most priests only have one sermon in them and, that I was no different from most priests.

Well, the people of St Marylebone heard that single sermon almost 1,000 times through 15 ½ years, but here it is, for the first time in this cathedral church.

*God is love,
we are all God’s children
and there is no room for fear in love.ⁱ*

This afternoon's first reading, dating from the middle of the 6th century before Christ, spoke to us of the mammoth task of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem after many years of exile, and there cannot be a dean, nor a parish priest, anywhere in England, who doesn't blanch whenever those words are read!

And there is certainly much to do here in Southwell, thankfully not quite as much as faced Haggai, Zerubbabel, Joshua and the returning exiles, but certainly enough for the Dean and Chapter of Southwell!

Whatever we will build through the coming years, we will do together, Dean, Chapter, Diocese, people of Southwell - and the many people I hope who will roll up their sleeves and work with us. Whatever we do, it will be with the assurance that

*God is love,
that we are all God's children
and there is no room for fear in because we will be help securely in God's love.*

But we live and work in incredibly anxious times.

We *are* afraid, the world is afraid; there is much that disturbs us and unsettles us.

In a brief conversation with Canon Angela Ashwin on Thursday of last week, she told me that the prayer card that is most in demand here in the cathedral is this one: *"Feeling Anxious and Afraid"*.

Fear stalks not only our world, but the pages of Scripture, from the Book of Genesis to the Book of Revelation.

The Patriarch Abram is 'afraid' when he hears God summons him to set out on a terrifyingly arduous journey, from the safety and prosperity of Ur, to a new and very uncertain homeland, 2,000 km away in Canaan.

The young Mary of Nazareth is understandably afraid when she is told that she carries God's very self in her womb.

Joseph the Carpenter Builder is afraid. Afraid to take Mary as his wife when he hears that she is pregnant with a child that cannot be his.

The shepherds, keeping their night watch over their sheep in the fields around Bethlehem are afraid when they are confronted by the extraordinary sight of angels as they settle down for the night.

Peter is afraid when, after a fit of bravado, he begins to sink into the deep waters of Galilee, and Mary Magdalen is afraid when she finds the tomb empty on Easter Day.

But each of them is told *not* to be afraidⁱⁱ, or rather, "*Don't run away! Don't flee!* from the task entrusted to you.

Why? because God is love, because they are God's children, because they have no need to be afraid of anything.

So, Abram puts his hand into God's hand, and is led step by painful step towards a new homeland;

Mary accepts the divine messenger's reassurance, that God is with her, and she stays put in Nazareth; she places her whole life and reputation securely into God's hands - and the eternal Word of God continues to take flesh in her womb;

Joseph, in his deep and troubled anxiety, doesn't pack up his tools, shut up shop and flee to another town; instead, he puts *his* life into God's hands and, in time, the child Jesus comes to place his hands into Joseph's hands and is safely led and guided through his childhood;

The shepherds don't run away in terror; they stand their ground and *when* they run, it is to the manger where they find the Saviour of the Universe;

Even Peter, comes, at last, through his many trials and tribulations, to place his hands confidently into the wounded hands that are stretched out to him, as he is tasked with leading the Church of God in Christ Jesus;

Mary Magdalene, when she is told not to be afraid stays where she is among the rotting corpses of Calvary to listen to the divine messenger's assurances before running, not away from God, but entrusted to tell Jesus' other devastated, frightened friends, that Jesus is alive and that they do not need to be afraid.

Abram, Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, Peter, Mary Magdalene – each was afraid, each heard God's voice, no-one fled, no-one ran away, each knew they were loved by God, each came to recognise that they were an adopted child of God with a job to do, just like Haggai, Zerubbabel, Joshua, Edwin, Ethelburga, Augustine, Paulinus – just like you and like me, secure in God's love, with a job to do, some definite serviceⁱⁱⁱ which no one else could do.

Having exchanged the Thames for the Trent, the Tyburn for the Greet, and Nottingham Place for Nottingham itself, my message, unapologetically remains the same, because it is the message that has remained unchanged since before the beginning of time:

God, is Love;
we are God's children,
and there is no room for fear.

To work! Alleluia!

ⁱ *qv.* 1 John 3 & 4

ⁱⁱ *Greek, me phobeisthe, me phobou*

ⁱⁱⁱ *St John Henry Newman, 1848, from a meditation*