

Excerpt from
Gates of Heaven: Sweet Love Remembered,
A History of Christ Church, Windsor,
125th Anniversary of the Building, 1882-2007
By The Rev'd David Curry.
(pp. 22-25, footnotes omitted)

"Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God"

Christ Church retains on its walls a number of scriptural passages which give further prominence to the significance of the structure as a spiritual place. Stepping into the narthex, the main introductory chamber of entrance to the Church, one discovers above the interior entry doors a curious phrase: "*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.*" It complements and belongs to the other scriptural statements found painted on the walls in the interior of the Nave, on the Chancel arch, and about the Rose Window above the font at the liturgical West end of the Church.

Above the Chancel arch are the words, "*I am He that liveth and was dead and behold I am alive for evermore,*" a marvelous testament to the essential pattern of death and resurrection that belongs to Christian life and which runs through the whole of *The Book of Common Prayer*. The words surrounding the Rose Window above the font capture as well a special spiritual significance: "*Suffer little children to come to me*" is Christ's radical invitation and command to enter into the spiritual life through holy Baptism and to persist in the life of teaching and prayer, worship and sacrament, service and sacrifice. "*Suffer*" here means 'let', in the sense of permit and encourage.

On one side of the Nave, there is inscribed the following, "*this is none other but the house of God; this is the gate of Heaven*" from the Genesis story of Jacob's dream of "*the angels of God ascending and descending*" upon a ladder stretching from the earth to heaven and the Lord's word to Jacob out of that vision that "*I am with you,*" signifying the church as the place of holy meeting between God and man in the spiritual journey of our lives. On the other side, the words of the prophet Habakkuk are inscribed, "*The Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him,*" words which proclaim the essential purpose of the holy space as a place of prayer and praise, evoking awe and wonder, and provided for use at Morning and Evening Prayer in *The Book of Common Prayer*. These Scriptural sentences capture wonderfully something of the reformed Catholicism of Anglican worship.

George Herbert, poet and preacher and celebrated seventeenth century Anglican divine, in his pastoral ideal for the ministry, "*A Priest to the Temple, or The Country Parson*" (the title itself capturing a wonderful balance and equipoise of reformed spiritual understanding), spoke of "*The Parson's Church*" as containing "*fit and proper texts of Scripture everywhere painted,*" signifying the sacramental significance of the word audible also rendered visible in the structure of the spiritual place, long before the gothic revival. Herbert would give eloquent expression to this sensibility at Leighton Bromswold, which he undertook to restore, and, more significantly, at the Church in Bemerton, near Salisbury, where he served. For Herbert, the Church building was itself but the living extension of God's Word, an embodiment of the living voice of Scripture.

At Christ Church, the writing on the walls has been retained despite the occasional attempt at removing this interesting and important expression of Anglican spirituality embodied in the building. In 1942, a motion at Parish Council to remove the text on the church walls failed for lack of a seconder to the motion. It is not always the vandals without but those within that wreak the greatest havoc! While some of the colours used on the walls have changed over the years, the texts themselves have been retained, with one exception.

There was once over the organ loft the psalm text, "*let everything that hath breath praise the*

Lord.” That has disappeared, probably as a result of the installation of the organ in the early 1890s.

Another scripture text, however, has been added. “*Blessed is he that considereth the poor and needy*” appears just above the alms box. Located on the wall to the right of the entrance from the narthex into the church proper, the alms box or poor-box, as it is sometimes called, is for free-will offerings which go towards the work of providing for the poor and indigent in the local community and beyond. Besides the local food-bank, which the Parish endeavours to support, the Parish runs a little food-bank out of the Parish Hall, offering canned and dried goods to those in need. The scripture text is a reminder of “*the works of corporal mercy*” which belong to the Church’s ministry and mission in the communities and in the land where it is placed. The alms box was dedicated on December 23rd, 1893.

But what about that curious Scripture phrase that catches the attentive eye upon entering the building? “*Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God.*” Taken from that most philosophical of all texts from the Old Testament, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, it expresses, in metaphorical and poetical form, the strongest possible affirmation of the spiritual purpose of the holy places which are to be entered upon intentionally and devoutly, paying attention, in other words, to the intent and purpose of the place, entering with a respectful spirit of devotion and the desire to learn. Thus might we become what we read and hear, see and receive, concerning “*the Word of life.*”

In keeping with the texts inscribed on the walls and as further testimony to this spiritual understanding, the very structure of the building reflects the idea of how we are contained within the living words of Scripture. The beams of the roof are known as “*Alpha and Omega*” beams. They form the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet – Alpha, like the letter ‘A’ which is derived from it, and Omega, ‘Ω’ which is the last letter in the Greek alphabet. The beams bear the distinct shape of these Greek letters. More significantly and symbolically, Alpha and Omega refer to Jesus Christ in *The Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine*. Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of our spiritual lives.

In the structure of Christ Church, we are embraced in the Alpha and the Omega, embraced by Christ, “*the author and finisher of our faith,*” as *Hebrews* puts it, complementing St. John’s insight. Thus the architectural structure serves a spiritual purpose and reminds us of our identity in the body of Christ.