

Building a Future

Numbers mean something, we mark anniversaries because they tell us something about longevity, each number or year given its own significance, either in age turning 13, 18, 21 or 65, 70 or even 100; or how silver, gold and platinum all mark big anniversaries. Unsurprisingly there aren't many 375th anniversaries of individuals! Well, not since the early chapters of Genesis anyway. So, I had a quick look to see if there is anything significant about the number 375 ... and I can report that there isn't really, unless you're into buses, it is a very popular bus route number. But it is also the hallmark for a 9-carat gold piece of jewellery, so maybe something to work with there.

375 years ago, the Regiment and this church were built out of the complexities and confusions of a nation in transition. This church, whose physical stones were literally the ruins of a previous rule, was built to appease the Puritan spirit of the Commonwealth era and stands today because the Regiment carried the stones here. A Regiment who marched to London laying down weapons for parliament and picking them up for King Charles II, after securing the city for the Monarch, and so securing their place as the oldest continuously serving regular regiment in the British Army.

Coldstream Guards 375th Anniversary

375 years later here we are, serving another Charles, King Charles III, I whose presence you will troop your colours on Saturday; in the church that still stands to serve the Trinity it is dedicated to, in, not just a nation that has changed, but in a radically different world.

The writer, Katherine May, has written, “when everything is broken, then everything is up for grabs.”¹ In the brokenness of a ruined castle there could have been neglect and abandonment. But the men of the Regiment carried the stones here to build a church to the glory of God.

It has echoes of our first reading from the prophet Isaiah:

“Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.”

Isaiah is painting a picture of a future that is better than the present for his listeners. In the context of justice, peace and righteousness he promises a rebuilding of ruins, a re-establishment of foundations so that a future can be

¹ May, Katherine, *Wintering*, p.140

Coldstream Guards 375th Anniversary

constructed. It's not too big a leap to see in the actions of 375 years ago a kind of fulfilling of these words.

But it doesn't stop there. In the brokenness of war and conflict, everything is also up for grabs. Humanity can either show itself at its worst, as we see in the conflicts that target innocent civilian children, or it can show itself at its best, infantry men serving with integrity and bravery, not solely confined to the sacrifice of those who lay down their lives, but certainly not less than that.

The love that Jesus speaks of someone laying down their life for others, as we gather to honour all those from this regiment who have done that over the last 375 years.

But foundations, rebuilding of ruins and even sacrifice are not solely the remit of the past, they also build a future. When Thomas Gumble wrote, "that small company of men whom God made the instrument of great things," he wasn't just talking about past glory but future hope as well. It reminds me of what the Church celebrates in Pentecost, just last Sunday, how God takes a small group of people and changes the world by the power of the Spirit. How a future is built through the lives of dedicated men and women.

Coldstream Guards 375th Anniversary

And as we celebrate this regiment, second to none, we also hope for a future that can be built on the values they enshrine; a future built on the foundations of what this place of worship stands for: peace, justice, righteousness, truth and equity, all of which we believe we see in Jesus.

375 years of history and tradition, 375 years of service and sacrifice, the history of this building and this regiment are indeed entwined. In looking back, we find the strength to look forward. That's the message of both the prophet Isaiah and Jesus, ruins will be rebuilt for a future nation and a future hope, life is laid down for future lives and future hope. We give thanks today for each of those 375 years, for all those who have served and all those who have sacrificed in whatever way.

But the message of Jesus is that each one of us has been chosen to do this work, we can't leave it to others. In our reading Jesus speaks to the disciples and through them to us, "I have chosen you to go and do the work."

However young or old we are, however suited or unsuited we feel to the task. And so, we commit ourselves to building a future on the foundations of 375 years of service for the regiment, to the Monarch and the country, and for all of us serving our fellow humanity in the power of the Holy Spirit to pursue

Coldstream Guards 375th Anniversary

justice, peace, truth and equity. That is a cause that all of us here can aspire to be second to none in.

Amen

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