**Magic Carpet sermon 1**

Trinity 11 - Peter the rock

Many people would say that the greatest city in Europe is Rome. Over the centuries it has been regarded as the centre of the civilised world and, of course, it is dominated by the basilica of St. Peter which must be one of the most famous churches in the world. It is honoured by all Christians because St. Peter's tomb is believed to be beneath the high altar.

Peter, our Lord's right-hand man, was tried and died in Rome because of his Christian faith. There was a long period of persecution of Christians, but eventually Constantine became emperor, and he was a Christian. He built a basilica over Peter's burial site. It would be on a grand scale then, but not as grand as the present one which was built to replace it in the 16th century.

The words of our Lord this morning ring in our ears. "You are Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church."

This morning I want to take you on a little adventure. We are setting off on a church safari just to have a quick look inside three churches all named after St. Peter. It's proper to start in Rome and have a look at its finest building.

Church buildings can speak to us in different ways. As we climb the steps, and look inside the huge bronze west door, we will be astonished at its size. Looking towards the altar in the distance, we see people moving about. They look so small and insignificant. They are dwarfed by the length of the nave and the height of the painted ceiling. As you stand and look around you, the space seems to make you feel small as well.  Our Minster in York doesn't do that.  But here, the sense of our own smallness in relation to God's greatness is brought home to us, as we take in the sense of scale.

The basilica speaks about the majesty and magnificence of God. Wherever you look, the whole building proclaims the power and strength of almighty God, celebrated by the most famous architects, artists, and craftsmen of the Renaissance. All of them contributed to its magnificence. But we can't stay. We're going to move on to London.

 So, we've come to another church of St. Peter in a London square. We won't be over-faced by its size. We might feel a bit hemmed in with all the fine terraced housing. We would certainly feel part of the hubbub of what is going on all around us. Traffic noise, business, a bustling local market, and the church in the middle of it all. A sense of God wrapped up in the ordinary things of daily life. God in a parcel. Even the bus stop is just near the main door of the church. Every time someone comes in or goes out, the singing of the congregation, the prayers of the people, the voice of the vicar preaching, get mixed up with the world outside. “That's life,” says the church warden. "That's what ‘church’ is all about. It's part of the humdrum, the goings on of ordinary folk. We love it. There's always something happening here at Peter's".

So far then, we've looked inside the church in Rome, which speaks about the unimaginable greatness of God, and puts you and me in perspective. We are very small in the divine scale of things.

Then in the London church, we can stand tall; we are not over-faced by the building, but we are part of a busy world. The divine and the human seem to belong together, and flow into each other in the ordinary business of daily living.

Time now to move on - up to a church in the Yorkshire dales. Once called St. Peter’s, it later became known as St. Hilda’s. A far cry from our last visit. It's at the end of a lane winding up a secluded valley. It's probably as old as that first basilica in Rome, since it was built by the Saxons. They enjoyed peace and quiet in their religion. This little gem of a church can only seat about two dozen people, not that it matters since there are only two farms and four labourers' cottages nearby. What matters is that God is there in the silence. If you do not find Him, then He will always find you. Someone once said to me "You can hear the silence at Ellerburn, and you can feel God very close".

It is beautiful, lovely, in its simplicity and its stillness. The very walls breathe prayer. They enfold you in a sense of presence. Sit there and be held in the eye of God's love.

Remember our Lord's words: "You are Peter and on this rock I will build my Church". He was not talking about buildings. No, of course not. He was talking about **faith**. Peter's faith stood firm. Rock-like. It was an inspiration. And all the church's buildings, whether called after Peter or some other Saint, are inspirational. They show us ourselves in relation to God. They speak to us of the beauty of holiness and holy things. They still our hearts and minds. They help us find God and be found by Him. That is what faith is all about.

These three things are here in this very chapel. Let it speak to you by its homeliness. Let it draw you by its simplicity and quiet beauty; and above all, let it help you to find God very close and very near, or to be found by Him.

What could be more wonderful than that!