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On Monday week, we shall handover this property to the developers, and wait for a new building to come up in what is now a public car park, where work has already started. Today is the final service in this building.

This morning we have been celebrating the lives of people who made this church the fellowship and community it is. We have named a few, but we do injustice to all, because everyone present, and anyone who has ever been a part of this fellowship has, in some way, shape or form, been a part of the ministry of this Church, sustaining it with their gifts and talents. Of course we know that a church is not a building, nor an institution, an organisation, sect or denomination.

It is interesting how changes in language, changes how we think and what we believe. The word **CHURCH** *should never* have a plural, because the Church is the body of Christ and there is only **ONE** Christ, so there is only one body, and therefore only one Church.

I want to leave you with three thoughts as we transition from one building to another, and offer you three responses, each appropriate for us to develop a fresh vision of Church for our fellowship and our community in Botley.

The first thing I want us get hold of and hang onto for dear life is this, **"Where God leads, He provides"**. The prophet Isaiah assures the people of Israel, ***The Lord will guide you continually and provide for you, even in parched places. He will rescue your bones. You will be like a watered garden, like a spring of water that won't run dry.***¹ What an assurance! God guides us ***continually and provide*** for us even in parched places, He does not forget any of us, even when our body is reduced to bones! It is not in the character of God, to abandon and forget those who love Him and follow Him.

¹ Isaiah 58:11

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Imagine for a moment, a young shepherd boy named David, tending his family flock day and night, looking up at the night sky wondering, ***When I look up at your skies, at all your fingers made, the moon and the stars that you set firmly in place, what are human beings that you think about them; what are human beings that you pay attention to them? You've made them only slightly less than divine, crowning them with glory and grandeur. You've let them rule over your handiwork, putting everything under their feet***². The vast, 360 degree night sky is very humbling, and reminds the young shepherd, the human race is God's special creation, crowned with glory and grandeur, to whom God has entrusted His creation.

Later, he examines his own life and says, ***You shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God—you are breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvellously made! I worship in adoration - what a creation! You know me inside and out, you know every bone in my body; You know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; every stage of my life was spread out before you. The days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day.***³

As individuals and as the human race, we are so special to God, there is no reason for us to ever doubt, **where God leads, He provides.**

How do we respond to such love, love which has no measure, no weight and no volume?

When God asked Moses to lead the Hebrew people from slavery under Pharaoh in Egypt, into freedom, Moses knew it was not going to be easy. Every time the Hebrew people faced an obstacle, they cursed Moses,

² Psalm 8:5 and Hebrews 2:7

³ Psalm 139:13-14

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telling him life the old days (as slaves!) in Egypt was better than the difficulties they faced, life **back then** in Egypt appeared more rosy with every passing day.

The human race has not changed in the past 5,000 years. All over the world, when people are faced with changing circumstances, the first thing they say, **It was much better in the old days when we were young.**

Their grumbling and discontent reached an unbearable stage, so Moses tells God, **"If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.** Consider the impact of this statement: God never leads us down a path without providing for us, and our response to this truth should be, **If you won't go with us, we are not budging from this place.**

The second thought I want to leave with you as we transition to another building, is this:

People are attracted to a new Church building, but people make the church their home, **only** when they find the following (4):

a worshipping community

a praying people,

a community committed to each other

a witnessing community, not a people handing out leaflets, but people who share the story of God in their lives (Deut. 6). This is what God has done for us; that's why, we are who we are.

People want their lives to be part of a larger story. The keen interest in tracing genealogies, is proof of this. There are many who cannot trace their family roots; for them God has provided a much larger family, whose head is Christ, and whose lineage goes back to Adam.

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A community which remembers the special and sacred moments taken place within the walls and on the grounds of a church, is a community grateful to God, honouring Him, in and through their lives.

We do not live in the past, nor for the past. The past is consigned to history.

Our present, shapes our future. Everything we do today, decides what our future will look like. If today we want to do what we have done in our past, tomorrow will be same and the day after, and so on, and we will never arrive at the future God has planned for us. If we decide, however, to surrender our past to the mercy of God, then **TODAY**, He will show us His future, and take us in that direction.

Our response to this second thought, that people are attracted to a new Church building, but people enter into fellowship and make the church their home when they find a worshipping community, a praying people, a community committed to each other and a witnessing community, is found in the second part of Moses' rant to God. He first told God, ***Unless You go with us from this place, we won't budge.*** He continues, ***How will anyone know that You are pleased with Your people unless You go with us? What else will distinguish Your people from all the other people on the face of the earth***⁴. We are different from all other people because of what God does for us, and we cannot stop talking about it!

Finally, the simple truth, we do not build to destroy, we destroy in order to build! The building behind me, facing you, is being bright down. When it was built, it was not built with a plan to destroy, but now, it has to be destroyed ignorer to build.

So it is with life, we do not live to die; we die in order that we may have life, eternal life that is which Jesus promised us and showed us how we

⁴ Exodus 33:15-16

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can have it, a life we do not yet know nor experienced, nor can we ever imagine what that life will be like. Once again, it is the prophet Isaiah who reminds us, ***since the world began, no ear has heard and no eye has seen a God like you, who works for those who wait for Him!***⁵

Getting to this day has not been without its challenges, most significantly the challenge of uncertainty and the tediousness of waiting.

So, as we move from here, across the road, then in late 2019 across the precinct to our new home, let's be encouraged in our hearts, minds and spirit,

- Where God leads, He provides. We should never budge unless God Himself travels with us and leads the way.
- People are attracted to a new Church building, but people stay and make the church their home, when they find a worshipping community, a praying people, a community committed to each other and a witnessing community prepared to talk about God at work among them.
- We have no idea what God has prepared for us to enjoy, unless we release our past into His care, and trust Him to lead us where He has prepared a place for us.

The lesson God wants is to take from this is this:

When a church builds a building, a community comes together.

When a community comes together, God grows His Church.

When God grows His church, **ALL** Heaven rejoices, and God opens the storehouse of Heaven's treasures for His Church!

AMEN

⁵ Isaiah 64:4