ST JOHN'S CATHEDRAL Brisbane

SERMON

Feast of Saints Simon and Jude, Apostles and Martyrs
Dedication Festival of this Cathedral Church
25th October 2026

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Deuteronomy 32:1-4
Psalm 145:10-13
Jude 1-3, 17-25
Luke 6:12-16

LET US BUILD A HOUSE WHERE LOVE CAN DWELL

Old Buildings Speak *by Marianne Reninger*

Time knows no beginning or end
Old Buildings wave and wend,
And the words live on in the wind…

Old Houses Speak
With words that time forgot
They groan and creak,
And settle and weep
For long-lost children
That played in their yards.

Old Barns Speak
Of braying donkey and milking cow;
Hens and ducklings
screeching and scratching
In the hay-laden, sweet-funk air.

Old Buildings Speak
Of their store-house of olden wares.
Tobacco drying,
Machines turning,
Lumber curing,
Fabric spinning,
Scissors trimming,
Of minds thinking there.

Old Sea Cottages Speak,
Of the briny wood and barnacle feet,
Of foghorn's belch and mermaid's greet,
And waves ever-slapping refrain.

Time knows no beginning or end,
Old Buildings wave and wend,
And the Words live on in the Wind…

There is much to love about this majestic house in which we find ourselves. It is not as old as many like it, and yet it is has seen a good deal in the years it has had. Not just her yard, but her heart has known the playing laughter of children. Many are lost to our company now, and have gone home to their eternal home, but as this building also reminds us: if we ourselves are to enter into God's kingdom, we must become like them. Perhaps, indeed, we should take care to **stay** like them, moved by joy and full of the innate language for the wonder of God. It is so easily replaced with less honest and more self-serving words as we age – a temptation to be fiercely avoided. It is, I think, a lovely image of stewardship to acknowledge that the older we get, the less it belongs to us. Instead, we seek to plant trees under which we will never sit, but will watch over this playground in the next generation, and the one after, and after, and after.

Despite her soaring stone-vault ceilings (very rare in these parts!), she has her moments of being much like a barn too. I do not mean this just to apply to Francistide, where the conventions and hesitations that give us pause for most of the year are set aside in favour of our furry and feathered friends. I mean also that if we have our priorities right, were the time to come again when a traveller arrived to us, his labouring wife on a donkey and finding no room at the inn, we should open wide our doors with all the hospitality we have to offer. Indeed, we should march that donkey right through the West doors, if we mean what we say in giving our lives to those who began our story in a stable.

She is, to be sure, also a store-house. A little more masonry than lumbar (though not none), and more craft than tobacco, but she is full of the fruits of our labour. The kneeler, woven among friends who gather regularly to be a place of safety and belonging. Friends who know that sometimes a conversation requires a project in hand, a gracious excuse to avoid eye contact in the rawest of moments, but are still patiently present, quietly putting bits and pieces of life back together. The thousands of drawings and crumpled papers of those children we met earlier, who confidently show us a new, but very true thing, about God. They can, because they are a whole and distinct persons, who knows whole and distinct things about the One in whose image they are made. Some of them grow to be the artisans that have given us the glorious gallery in which we worship, throwing a rainbow somewhere at any given sunlit moment of the day. How many colouring in pictures of Jesus and the saints lie behind them, we cannot know, but I am confident there are some!

I wondered, as I reflected on this poem, whether she might also a cottage? The kind where on a warm day, you can smell salt on the air? I think she might be, and not just because from time to time we have enough strong winds in this corner of the world to drive in a coastal storm or two. There are also a good number of stones in this cathedral church that have caught the tears of those who have found it a place of embrace for whatever looms large on their soul. She holds more bereavement, conflict, reconciliation, renewal, and love than one sees on the surface, but it has soaked into her bones. To receive those tears and hold them is in no small part why she is here. And why we are here.

And so, we are given pause to ask ourselves today: What measure of my life will I leave inside these walls? It will, God willing, long outlast everyone here present. One day, our children's children's children will be collecting all of our worship, community, and labour into a few short lines of prayer, as we are doing today for those who came before us. We will not be the residents of this beautiful old house anymore, but we will have left our mark.

Not we know, for the stone and glass itself, but for what it makes possible in a world of endings and beginnings:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak;
let the earth hear the words of my mouth.
May my teaching drop like the rain,
my speech condense like the dew;
like gentle rain on grass,
like showers on new growth.

(Deuteronomy 32:1-2)

Amen.