

Raine's Foundation address to celebrate 300 years
Father Brian Ralph SCP
Saint Paul's Cathedral Evensong, 8th May 2019.

So here we are then, 300 years, here we are in the middle of the season of transformation, the season of transformative love.

When I was asked to leave my secondary school at the age of 15 because of some utterly bad behaviour, the last thing that I thought was that I would spend nearly 10 years of my life as a secondary Anglican foundation school chaplain or that I would be addressing you from this very large pulpit in this very big church.

Our Lord has a strange way of getting his own back on us, and of surprising us. This certainly took me by surprise.

My 10 years at Raine's were some of the happiest and challenging times of my life. We did mad things, explored our common life together, travelled to the Holy Land and spent some great times together in the office over the road. We spent a week with Heavy Load, a punk band from the south coast some of whom have learning difficulties. They taught us all much about ourselves and our relationships with others.

Our school over the last 300 years has been through some wonderful times and some very difficult times. We have loved people and we have lost people. We have laughed and we have cried together. We have celebrated the magnificent achievements of the students, some of whom faced some enormous challenges along the way. We have sent young people to some of the best universities in the land, others have gone to work for NGO's overseas and for the United Nations. We have celebrated great athletes from Raine's and produced the drummer from The Clash.

The Christian life has to be centred on God and on each other, our faith is not target driven or about statistics, it is about imitating our Lord in giving life, life in abundance, on celebrating each person and each person's gifts., the gifts that he gave us.

Over the years we witnessed some amazing dancers, singers, rappers and music makers. Poets, artists, sports people, writers and those who love Mathematics.

It has been inspirational to be among teachers and support staff who are truly committed to their vocation and calling, using their gifts to inspire and to love the students, to encourage, guide and nurture. This is our calling; this is our duty to God and man.

Jesus called those who were everyday people like us and set about transforming their lives and ours in a spirit of liberation, setting free and the unexpected. Through the cross has come the resurrection and the transformation of our lives and can transform the world. Out of this darkness has come a blazing light, and as we look towards Pentecost, the transforming power and love of the spirit of justice and truth. These are the foundations that we build our Christian service on. And yes, we can set up military style academies to help us reach our goals, but the goal posts keep moving and we are not the army. We are a Christian foundation.

Next time you hear the dreaded shout go up "We have had the call" meaning that we are about to be inspected within an inch of our lives, lets instead, make it our daily mantra and lifelong manifesto.

We've had the call. We've had the call to educate, liberate and to give life in abundance to all, using our gifts and talents.

This 300-year journey will and must continue, this legacy will live on, it may be transformed into something different, it may take us in another direction individually and collectively but we will carry it forward for the next generation.

Paul says in his letter to the Ephesians, which our present School chaplain Rev Chris Newman Day so wonderfully read for us, "We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness and deceitful scheming. But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into Him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

My own parish church of St Barnabas Bethnal Green was bombed during the war, the whole inside was incinerated and all that was left was a shell. It could have been torn down and replaced by flats, But the people of Bethnal Green knew the needs of the local community and their need of the God of Love, even in those dark days. They rebuilt it, they transformed it, they had a vision, a vision inspired by people like Henry Raine. They opened the doors in 1957 and asked a order of nursing sisters to move in and care for the poor among them and Sunday school teachers to provide education to those who had none.

This must be our vision too.

St Barnabas was known as the Son of encouragement to those who knew him. Is this what we are to be? Is this what we are called to be, Sons and daughters of encouragement, of light, hope and peace.

May this 300 year legacy continue into a bright future, encouraging our young people, encouraging each other and encouraging our communities, building each other up in real self-sacrificial love, in whatever form that takes.

Today is the 646th anniversary of the visions seen on her deathbed of Julian of Norwich, a 30 year old woman. She said:

"If there is anywhere on earth a lover of God who is always kept safe, I know nothing of it, for it was not shown to me. But this was shown: that in falling and rising again we are always kept in that same precious love."

"All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well."

Amen.