

Thought for the Day 14 July 2020 from Adriaan van Klinken (All Hallows)

1 Samuel 1.21-2.11 and Luke 19.41-48

As the lockdown rules gradually relax, our churches slowly open again, or at least start planning for it. The readings today are timely, as they invite us to think about the purpose of the places and buildings we consider sacred and that we use for our worship.

The first reading centres around the tabernacle in Shiloh. The tabernacle was the portable sanctuary – a tent – that has been constructed by Moses as a temporary place of worship while the Israelites wandered through the desert. It continued to serve its purpose long after the Israelites had settled in the Promised Land, up to the building of the temple. We encounter Elkanah and Hannah, an elderly couple who had received a baby after Hannah had cried and prayed relentlessly. Some years later, when the boy, Samuel, is old enough, his mother returns to the tabernacle and leaves him with the priest. She dedicates her long-awaited son to God, as an expression of her gratitude.

Our second reading centres around the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was the heart of Jewish worship at the time, with daily offerings being carried out and with ceremonies on religious festivals. However, we encounter Jesus cleansing the temple from those using it for economic rather than religious purposes. He was committed to restoring the temple as a house of prayer and worship, and he even compared the temple merchants to robbers.

Jesus' cleansing of the holy temple reminds us that the buildings used for religious worship are just that: buildings. Their usage defines whether they are truly sacred, or not. They can lose their sacredness and instead become a 'den of robbers'. The story of the tabernacle reminds us that even a temporary place, a portable tent, can be truly sacred: serve as meeting point between God and humans, a place where our prayers are heard and answered, and where we can express gratitude to God.

As we prepare to gradually move into our church buildings, and while many of us continue to worship online from home, these two stories remind us what our worship truly is about. As much as the place of worship matters, what really matters is not the building, but what we bring to it, how we are invested in it – the worship of our heart and lives.