



PROVINCIAL GRAND LODGE OF HAMPSHIRE AND ISLE OF WIGHT

March 2017

Tercentenary Cathedral Service - Address by RWBro Revd Dr John R H Railton, JGW

A hundred years ago there were two separate schools in the Close here in Winchester. In 1930 my late father was appointed second master at the Cathedral Choir School which later merged with Pilgrim's School. His five years as part of the Close community made a deep and lasting impression on him, and his happy memories of that time were very much a part of my early life. I've attended services here a number of times over the years having been Ordained and served for some years in the adjacent Diocese of Portsmouth, but it's a privilege for me to preach here for this special service to celebrate the Tercentenary of English Freemasonry, especially in my mother Province of Hampshire and Isle-of-Wight. So I'm most grateful to the Provincial Grand Master for inviting me, and to the Dean and Chapter of this great Cathedral for allowing me to do so.

In the reading from the First Book of Kings we heard of the dream, the vision of the newly anointed King Solomon, having travelled as a pilgrim to Gibeon; of his imagined dialogue with God; of his response to an apparently completely open offer to give him whatever he wanted, anything at all! Well, we might reflect on how we would have responded to such an invitation. Solomon could have asked for status, for power, for wealth, but he didn't. His reaction cannot help but move us deeply. Instead of seeking privilege he displayed an astonishing degree of humility and humanity, a profound desire, not to dominate but to serve, a recognition of his need for divine guidance. *"I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Give thy servant an understanding mind that I may discern between good and evil."* His fervent prayer was answered, his wisdom became legendary, and that wisdom was rooted in his readiness to seek divine inspiration and guidance in every aspect of his life. Perhaps Solomon had in mind part of the creation story in the Book of Genesis: *"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them."* ALL people, irrespective of gender, race, color or creed are made in the image of God; ALL people have within themselves the potential to 'become' – to grow, to develop, gradually to evolve into that which rejoices God's heart. For most of us, it's the work of a lifetime and we can only hope to achieve it by seeking guidance from above. How else can humankind respond to the self-giving love of God for his people than by conforming to His plan and offering to him the very best of all we can do and create, and all we can BE?

The First Book of Kings goes on to describe in detail the construction of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, a story familiar to every Freemason; a story which is an allegory of our responsibility to build a symbolic temple in our lives to the honour and glory of our creator. In these Biblical texts are many lessons which Freemasons have taken fully on board. We know and understand the value of working together, of each making our modest individual contributions to the ceremonial and charitable work of our Lodges and, together, achieving something not only worthwhile but quite beautiful. We know and understand the value of our history – the story of the development both of the Masonic Craft and of our Lodges, for it's the story of the devoted service of past generations of Masons on whose work and achievements we continue to build. We know and understand the sacredness of the Trust we bear and our responsibility to ensure that Freemasonry continues to be of service to our families, our communities and our nation. We will not betray that Trust nor shirk that responsibility.

We Masons love our Craft and the ceremonial to which we devote so many hours while walking the dog or pacing the carpet and learning our part in the ceremonies. We love the deep symbolic teaching within it which immeasurably enriches the quality of the way in which we live our lives and relate to

those around us and to our creator, the Great Architect of the Universe. And we do our very best in our everyday lives to live up to the high standards and high principles which lie at the heart of Freemasonry. We don't always succeed – but we know that we wouldn't do half as well without our Masonic Craft. And we know that the reason the Craft is so powerful a support in all we do is that we begin and end our work in prayer for Divine blessing and guidance.

Then we turn to the work of the author and poet Rudyard Kipling. An unusual name – I wonder how many of you know that his Christian name was chosen because his parents conducted their courtship on the banks of Rudyard Lake in Staffordshire? I suspect many of you are familiar with what must be one of the best known poems of all time and was read a few minutes ago, Kipling's 'IF'. It's been precious to me for many years, and there's been a copy hanging on the wall of every office or study I've occupied for the last fifty-five years. I might be hard-pressed now, but I used to be able to recite it at the drop of a hat, and needed little encouragement to do so. At one level, Kipling sets out a daunting schedule of objectives, of standards of personal conduct for which to strive, of suppression of self and promotion of service.

Whenever I read the first two lines – *"If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you"* – I wonder if Kipling had in mind the Director of Ceremonies of a Lodge! Because, as I'm sure you know, Joseph Rudyard Kipling was a Mason.

'If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you and make allowance for their doubting too' – speaks to me of a desire and a willingness not just to exercise sound judgement, but to do it with the guidance of the Divine Spirit which dwells within, to accept the responsibility we bear to ensure that our judgements and our trust in those judgements are founded on an understanding of all the circumstances and in compassion for our fellow creatures. And more than that, to have the courage and the determination to maintain what we believe passionately to be right and, without arrogance, to carry it through; with humility to accept that not everyone shares our particular perspectives.

'If you can wait and not be tired by waiting'

Patience isn't the easiest of the virtues to acquire and to maintain, especially in the 'demand-driven' culture in which we live. But waiting on God behoves us all; didn't our Lord himself charge his Disciples to 'stay in the City'? Not to rush out immediately and start doing good works, but to wait for strength and inspiration before they embarked on the task he had given them of continuing his work, thereby ensuring that the work they would do would be worthy and in accordance with the Divine plan. Time is so precious; although we sometimes think we can, actually we can't make time, or lose time; we can't earn time or expend time; but we can use it; and time spent doing is so much more rewarding and fulfilling and, ultimately, of greater value if preceded by time spent just being. And in the being, waiting on God, and seeking both his guidance and his blessing on our waiting and on our doing.

What of Truth? *'Being lied about, don't deal in lies and yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise!'* – find echoes in the Mosaic Code – *'Thou shalt not bear false witness'* – and in one of the Three Great Pillars on which Masonry is founded, Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. But in Kipling's exhortation to deal only in truth, there is a reminder with humour and perception of the dangers of complacency, and of the need to avoid pride or false piety in our insistence upon truth, and to do it with humble acceptance of our weak humanity.

'If you can dream and not make dreams your master; if you can think, and not make thoughts your aim' reminds us of our God-given capacity for creativity, for visionary exploration of the possibilities for the future, for hope and optimism – but without sticking our heads in the clouds and with our feet firmly on the ground; without allowing dreams and visions to take over as an end in themselves but, instead, to follow them through and work out how to realise them in action. Thank God for dreamers – they have their place. And thank God for those who can grasp the vision of others and turn concept into reality.

'If you can meet with triumph and disaster and treat those two imposters just the same' – must surely challenge us to examine our priorities, to face with humility and equanimity whatever life may place in our path, confident in the knowledge of God's presence with us and his strength to help us to cope. It was Paul writing to the Romans who said that *'suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint'* – a sort of game of consequences to help us to understand that every experience of the negative has within it the seed of the positive; that we would not understand success if we have never experienced failure; that we could not recognise happiness if we had never known sorrow. So are not triumph and disaster two sides of the same coin? We cannot appreciate one if we have not known the other.

'If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew to serve your turn long after they have gone' – sheer will-power enables us to discover inner resources we didn't know we had; reminds us of the power of the 'Comforter', the Advocate Jesus promised would come to the Disciples. The origin of words is fascinating, isn't it? That word 'comfort', for example; it may make us think of relaxation and pleasure and ease, but the Latin scholars among you will know that its origin is *'cum fortis'* – with strength; and Masonry too tells of the need for Fortitude.

'If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, or walk with kings not lose the common touch' reflects one of many joys of Masonry in that we meet 'on the level' - that there is no 'side', no discrimination, no snobbery, that we recognise that all are equal in the sight of God, that *'he who is placed on the lowest spoke of fortune's wheel is equally entitled to our regard with him who has attained its highest'*. There's another well-known Kipling poem which tells with great humour of the members of his Lodge in India, men from all walks of life in both Indian and British communities in those far-off days of 'Empire' meeting together without social or class distinctions.

The climax of the poem is in the final two lines: ***"IF you can achieve all these things Yours is the earth and everything that's in it and – which is more – you'll be a man, my son!"*** Isn't that another way of saying that seeking divine guidance in striving for improvement is the route to fulfillment of the image of God within us?

Rudyard Kipling was born in 1865 in what was then Bombay. After schooling in England he returned to India and to a career in journalism, being Initiated as a Mason at the age of twenty in Lahore. In his Lodge were Brethren of many different faiths, including the Jewish, Hindu, Sikh and Muslim faiths. What's clear from his work, especially a poem entitled 'The Mother Lodge', is that one of the things about Masonry which appealed to him was that men from all walks of life and many faiths could come together as equals, celebrating the high moral and ethical standards which they had in common. For Freemasonry is not a religion nor a substitute for religion; on the contrary it is a supporter of religion. It expects all its members to adhere to the teachings of their own faith, and only those men and women who profess a faith in God and seek to live by spiritual standards can become Masons. Women? Yes, certainly – while membership of the United Grand Lodge of England is open only to men, there are parallel and well-supported Masonic organisations for women which share the same ideals. To those who know Freemasonry for what it really is and what it really does and are not influenced by the caricatures of which some elements of the media are so fond, there is so much to celebrate, so much for which we can be grateful and in which we can take quiet pride. Not least is the amazing achievement of this Province which has surpassed all previous records in raising a staggering £7.75m in its recent Charity Festival.

There are many theories about the origins of Freemasonry but the truth, I think, is lost in the mists of time. What we know is that three hundred years ago, four London Lodges of non-operative or speculative Masons formed the first Grand Lodge. From that small beginning, Freemasonry has grown and spread throughout the world. We have our detractors, of course – what organisation doesn't! – but as Freemasons we are justly proud of our Craft and all it achieves in the lives of its members and their families, and in the wider community. In a few months' time our Tercentenary year reaches its climax when we gather in The Royal Albert Hall celebrating all that Freemasonry has achieved in those three hundred years, and rededicating ourselves to the task of continuing its great work in the certain knowledge that God will bless our Craft in the future as he most assuredly has in the past.