

19th May 2020

Pointing

“Safe bind, safe find.”

A mid-16th century proverb

In *Tom Sawyer*, Mark Twain describes this early-morning scene: *Breakfast over, Aunt Polly had family worship; it began with a prayer built from the ground up with solid courses of Scriptural quotations, welded together with a thin mortar of originality; and from the summit of this she delivered a grim chapter of the Mosaic Law, as from Sinai.*

To discover whether Aunt Polly’s worship had any beneficial effect on the normally recalcitrant Tom, you can read *Tom Sawyer* for yourself. But I’m interested in the “thin mortar” Aunt Polly used.

Any builder will tell you that mortar has to be mixed in proper proportions of sand, cement-dust and water. In my student labouring jobs, “Get the mix right” was a regular instruction, whether with a cement-mixer, or on a board or flat piece of ground. Get it wrong, and there was trouble – usually for me!

Mortar is used to bind things. If it’s too thin, it doesn’t work. And, over time, especially when exposed walls are subject to the vagaries of the weather such as we have here, mortar gets crumbly and falls away. Parts become porous. And if the wall isn’t in actual danger of collapse, there’s the problem of dampness and water penetration. The wall isn’t doing its job. That’s when “pointing” becomes important, as skilled masons carefully strip away the crumbling mortar and replace it with new material that makes the wall fit for purpose. From historic buildings to the garden wall behind my house, new pointing restores the walls.

As we build walls for the future of our church, communities and society, let’s make sure our mortar isn’t too thin! And since it’s more likely that *re-pointing* will be our task, let’s be bold and strip away the crumbling mortar in our walls of life and faith, and replace it with a binding that will make our future walls fit for purpose for a long while.

A prayer for today

Bind us together, Lord, with strength of purpose and clarity of resolve, that we might build cohesion and compassion into all our future. Amen

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