

# A PREACHER AT ANOTHER PREACHER'S CHURCH

## First Sunday In Lent At St. John's

IN the small vestibule of Lincoln's newest church a number of eager young faces smiled a welcome on me as we kicked snow off our shoes together, before entering St. John's Church on the Ermine Estate, Lincoln. A few moments later, I saw these boys again, as choir boys taking their places on the platform, where the pianist played a voluntary as they settled down with hymn books in their hands.

The Curate of St. Mathias, Lincoln, Rev. Christopher Laurence, is preaching at St. John's during Lent where soon a new Curate will be taking over the work in this growing parish. The Rev. W. T. Armstrong of St. Nicholas Church is the vicar of St. John's.

Mr. Laurence told me that his father, Canon H. P. Laurence, is Vicar of Horncastle, and that his Grandfather and Great-grandfather too, served the Parish Churches of Lincolnshire as clergymen.

THE church hall is of unusual design. The Sanctuary is built outward from the wall, to the right as you enter, midway between the entrance and the platform. It is marked by a framework over which is a gilt cross. Two roller shutters, with a door either side, close the Sanctuary off for secular purposes. The doors stand open and the shutters up when the building is used as a church.

The chairs face across the hall toward the Sanctuary, with the platform to the left of the congregation.

Only the Sanctuary has been painted and hidden lights give a pleasing effect, making it the focal point for worship. A delicate shell pink above the altar contrasts with the purple of the altar drapings and white walls throw the furnishings in bold relief.

Two candles were lit on the altar, one either side a small wooden Cross.

In front, and to the right of the altar stood a low reading desk and chair, and Mr Laurence, wearing a black cloak over his vestments, stood here for a short time before going into the small

vestry, leading off the Sanctuary, to the right.

As he returned wearing a surplice and hood the service began, the congregation standing as Mr. Laurence called us to worship and leading us in prayer. In this service of Evensong the prayers and hymns had a special bearing on Lent. The lessons were read by two members of the congregation, each going forward in turn to read, first from the Old Testament in Genesis, chapter 21, and from St Matthew's Gospel, chapter 26, verses 1-30.

Preaching on a text, from the first Epistle of St John, chapter 4, verses 10 and 11 "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." Mr. Laurence said "I want you to imagine a large party of young hikers in some rough and wild part of our country. An average mixed bunch coming from all parts. And they are all setting off on a long and hard hike to visit the most beautiful scene the country possesses, a still crystal lake set in a remote and lovely valley.

"Some of the hikers rush off, full of eagerness, but later get tired and disheartened by the hardness of the journey. Eventually they sit down exhausted to eat their lunch, overlooking some lesser view, and return to camp.

Others of the party only joined for company, and soon get tired when the journey gets rough. They decide that no amount of beauty is worth that amount of work, so they slip back to camp to find lighter entertainment. But some of the hikers take the journey steadily, and find their efforts bountifully rewarded—though, of course, those who didn't get there will never believe them.

"Coming back to ourselves,

I wonder which group of hikers you would want to join, because tonight we are like those hikers, we are setting off together on a journey; a journey through Lent to Easter. It will be a hard journey, most terrible of all it will involve going up the hill of Calvary."

Asking the question "Are you eager to run to the foot of the Cross?" he warned, "If so, be steady as we begin the journey."

Going on to show that the journey to Calvary is a journey of love to which God is calling us, the preacher said "There is a reason why we should stay together and not split into groups like the hikers. We are a family, new family in a new house, but nonetheless a true family of God. And we must help each other to make the journey. Perhaps we don't know each other as well as we ought. Let us set about remedying this tonight. Before you leave church tonight get to know someone you may not have met before, here.

"If you have any differences with anyone, settle them now, that our journey may be in good fellowship and love."

Suggesting an exercise to help to strengthen us on our journey he asked us to read each day a portion of St. Mark's Gospel, so timing our reading that we read together the Passion and Death of Christ on Good Friday, and the Resurrection on Easter Day.

Ending his sermon on a hopeful and challenging note, he said "We must stay together and turn our eyes upward to God, then we shall be better fitted to look outward to this community, in which we are set as a Church of Jesus Christ, that the family may grow. It depends on each one of us, on you and on me. Are we ready to begin the journey together?"

One couldn't help thinking that it would be easy to have said "yes" to Mr. Laurence's closing question.

There is an "invitation" in his speaking which is clear and manly with a preaching appeal hard to resist.

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What a thrill to be a member of a young family in a house too new to be given a coat of paint! Recalling the opening and Service of Dedication only a few weeks ago when the Bishop of Lincoln, Dr M H Harland, spoke enthusiastically of the work already begun, and the hopes for the future, I was glad to be here again, sharing the



REV. C. LAURENCE

joys of these folk in their new church.

Many young folk made up the congregation numbering about 80, which, considering the weather, was an encouraging start for the journey. There is room for many more, willing to go with them.

How long will it be before building can begin on the new church on this site? The answer to this question lies with the folk on this vast estate. As the family grows, so hopes will rise.

On a nearby site a Free Church is to be erected and at present this congregation worships and holds its Sunday School in the Infant School close by.

There has been fullest co-operation in the work among the young. Joint Sunday Schools have been running for some time, only separating when St John's moved into their new home. Close co-operation will help to build up the true family relationship, preached by Mr Laurence, and prayed for as we worshipped together.

The journey has begun, they will grow in strength.

H.S.M.