**Sermon – Sunday 13th July 2025 – Dedication Sunday + Baptism**

**May I speak in the name of the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

Today we are celebrating the dedication of St Barnabas as a house of prayer and in a few minutes, I will be baptising Reign and we will welcome her into the church of God.

96 years ago, on the 13th July 1929 the then Bishop of Southwark dedicated St Barnabas and worship moved from the Hall to the Church and this building became a place of worship and a place where the people of God celebrated and lamented, as the various life events that we all experience were marked.

We are the successors to all those who have gone before us and sat in the pews where you are seated, who have worshipped here through all the turbulent times that this country and the world have experienced.

It survived relatively unscathed the Second World War and the only time the doors have been closed in these 96 years was during the recent pandemic and if the bricks could speak, I expect they would tell the story of the community here in Downham, those who live and have lived on the Estate, which itself celebrates 100 years of the first resident this year.

This week the funeral service of Olive Gray was held in the church and her family has a long connection with St Barnabas and one of the photographs that was displayed at the wake was of Olive and her late husband Ronald, holding one of her grandchildren at their baptism, here at St Barnabas.

The cycle of life.

Reign joins the many hundreds of individuals who have been baptised in the font that is near the doors of the Church – as the plan in the Narthex indicates, originally the glass divide was not in place and the seats went all the way to the door – and upstairs as well – with seating for 698 people.

The font by the door as a place of welcome and a place where we are welcomed into God’s family – baptised with water in name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

New life in Christ and as Paul wrote to the early church in Ephesus, a member of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and the prophets, with Christ as the cornerstone.

As the Psalmist writes: -

*“I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord”.*

That should be our approach when we come to Church – not seeing it as a chore or a burden but an opportunity to meet with God, to spend time in the stillness listening and speaking to God, singing God’s praises, receiving the sacraments and supporting one another as we journey through life.

As we thought last week, we can support each other with their burdens and receive support with our burdens.

It is into this family that Reign is to be baptised and welcomed and for mum and dad, the Godparents, brother Bailey and wider family and friends, there is the duty to ensure that she, in due course, grows up within God’s family and takes her place in the life of the faith community.

Our readings today refer to the Temple, the House of the Lord, and our Gospel reading in that occasion whereby Jesus showed anger as he turned over the tables of the moneychangers.

Jesus was angry that the moneychangers and the traders were taking advantage of those coming to worship and fulfil their religious duties – people had to change the normal currency into Temple coins and the ancient equivalent of extortionate exchange rates or dynamic pricing probably applied - or purchasing the animals for their offerings, and again a monopoly probably existed.

The spirit of worship was lacking and Jesus wanted to restore the Temple to its true purpose – a place to meet with God.

St Barnabas over the past 96 years has been a place where people can meet with God and to celebrate key events in their lives, as well as marking those events that are part of being human.

To smile and to cry, to be human.

Over the years those who have gone before us have worked to maintain the fabric of the building and I, as the current priest, am grateful for their faithful service over the years and those of you who continue this valuable work, often unseen and unheralded.

For we are all called to serve, and later in the service we will commit to encouraging Reign in due course to play her part within the community of faith and follow the example of those who have gone before us.

In talking to you here over these past 13 years, various names keep cropping up as people who gave years of service to God here in this place as St Barnabas sought to meet the needs of those who came through the doors or lived on the Estate.

It is in part their faithfulness that we honour and remember today as we give thanks to God for our life together in this place.

As we are reminded on many occasions, the Church of God is not the building, it is the people of God.

Each of us gathered here today is a representative of and a member of the Church.

Reign will formally join in a few moments and as part of her baptism, I will mark her with the cross using the oil of baptism as a reminder that she belongs to God and should not be afraid to profess her faith in Christ crucified as she grows up.

And I will baptise her with water, a symbolic washing away of sin and the old self as she is born anew into new life, empowered by God’s spirit.

At the end of the service, I will present her with her baptism candle as a symbol of the light of Christ that we are all encouraged to take out into the world.

For our faith is not something that we restrict to the four walls of the Church, just for a Sunday or any other day when we come to church.

No, our faith is 24/7 and we are encouraged to take it out into our homes, schools, offices, shops, wherever we spend our time.

The generations who have met and worshipped in this building over the past 96 years have faithfully done this and we are their successors, with that privilege and responsibility.

St Barnabas has stood at the centre of the Estate for the past 96 years and, God willing, will do so for many, many years to come.

All of us gathered here today, young and old, have a responsibility to ensure that it continues to be a Christian presence, demonstrating the love of God, to those who come through the doors, and those who don’t, for the glory of God.

**Amen.**