

New Building Opening Architect Pete Jennings & Paul Levy

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Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] When Paul first came to me talking to me about this vision that you had, this vision to build a new church, and he showed me a little sketch that he had done of what he imagined that that church might look like.

! It's a very close resemblance to what we've ended up with. We were obviously really excited and we spent the last seven years on various iterations and planning permissions and working drawings and then finally building it.

And I guess from an architectural point of view, the sort of tensions of the project have always been the same. The idea of providing a range of different types of space for different pastoral and community uses simultaneously.

Having this range of size of spaces, so a really big hall at the back. How do you accommodate that in quite a tight-knit residential area, along with lots of smaller rooms that can be used at the same time.

And how do you do all of this on quite an awkwardly shaped site, along a narrow site, with the added complexity of a listed building that you were hoping might not get listed.

[1 : 30] So there's sort of those pragmatic concerns, and then also I suppose the poetic ones. So what does a church like that look like in the 21st century?

What does it mean to build a Presbyterian church? And how does the look and feel, as well as the sort of pragmatics, how does the look and feel of the church serve the church's vision here in the community?

How do you make Francis Schaeffer proud at the end of the day? And what we developed was a building that sort of cradles the existing chapel that wraps around it, and so it appears in various parts of the building as this kind of interior object.

Which is quite interesting, and especially when you get inside it, as just another interior room. And then the main big space, I don't know what you'll end up calling this, the new chapel, something like that.

But pushed to the back of the site, away from the road. I remember Paul saying that he wanted it to be intentionally good. That was his sort of catchphrase.

[2 : 39] I don't know what an intentionally or unintentionally good building would look like, or indeed an intentionally bad one. But our intention was always that it was good, so hopefully it's lived up to that.

We wanted to create a space that had permanence and atmosphere, and that also was surprising and uplifting for people who came to worship here, or just came to visit.

Somewhere that was warm, and inviting, and inviting, and inviting. And a space that sounded really good to be in.

But then you have this main space, and the trick is, how do you connect that to the community?

How do you reach out with your main meeting space, both sort of, I suppose, physically and metaphorically?

And so the chapel roof becomes this kind of ribbon in cross-laminated timber that moves towards the front of the site, towards the community, and adopts this smaller scale of sort of residential roof-scape, and the local houses, and then peaks to an abstracted spire at the front.

[3 : 50] And I think one of the things we were really keen was that that space was really open, and inviting, and transparent. And I love the fact that you can come to the front door and see your way all the way through and into the chapel.

It's very different from the kind of enclosed sort of Gothic churches where you're afraid to open the front door. And obviously something like this doesn't happen by accident, so there's been loads of other people, not just me involved in this, both from our company.

But I've got to thank Paul for thinking of us, Adrian and Jess and the building committee for having an extra part-time job for the last few years.

For David for bringing some Irish grit and decisiveness to help the church kind of negotiate this really complex project. And to Arul, who's here as well, from the building team, who actually built the thing, and I really have fond memories of...

Pitching up at 6pm to when all your builders have gone home at 3pm to talk you through the latest issues, or for you to talk me through them. So we're really proud of this. We hope you will be too.

[5 : 10] And we hope it helps you sort of reach up and reach out with the gospel. Thanks. Thank you, Pete.

And having heard how this was designed and built, and the story thus far, it would be great to hear why we did this, what it's for, and why we do these things.

So in that case, let me introduce our minister, who's very rarely called the Reverend Paul Levy, but he is the Reverend Paul Levy. Paul. Well, again, let me thank you for coming and giving up Friday night to join with us.

Why have we built this building? You could say, couldn't you, that everyone needs a home. That's something that's built into humanity. All human beings have that sense.

We know, don't we, in the city that we live in, people long to get on the property market. Maybe that's you. And you think, well, churches need places. Churches need bases to work from.

[6 : 22] Like we need a home. And that would be right to a degree. But that isn't the reason why we've built this building. The reason we've built this building is because of who God is. Our story in this church is that there is a God who can be known.

The message that we speak about Sunday by Sunday is that there is a God who's not distant, but he's made himself known through the Lord Jesus Christ, his son.

And our story is that we are a very, very ordinary group of men and women and boys and girls who've come to know God through his son. We live in really confused days, don't we?

Uncertain days, particularly this week. Days of fake news, broken promises, and uncertainty. But the Christian message, historic Christian message, is a message of hope and love and truth.

It's not a fairy tale. The Christian message is one that can be investigated. It's truth that's stood the test of time. And it's truth that's changed our lives. And our hope and our desire is that you might come to know this message.

[7 : 38] The message of a God who's come to rescue. To rescue us from our rebellion against him. To deal with our selfishness. To deal with our living in his world without any reference to him.

And the great promise of a God will one day remake the world. And that's the message that we are promising as a church to hold out to you. We want to welcome you. We want to welcome anyone and everyone.

The message of Jesus Christ is for all types of people. From all types of places. In all types of situations. As a church family, we're not perfect.

And we're far from that. In fact, we probably will annoy you with our parking. We're going to try our best not to. But what we're saying is we have found something in the message of the Bible that's changed our lives.

I think secularism can lead to selfishness. You know that I have to decide what's right for me and what's wrong for me.

[8 : 44] And religion is so tribal, isn't it? We have the truth. You don't have the truth. And, well, we're in the right and everyone else is wrong.

But what I want to say to you tonight is that if you will understand historic Christianity, it will show you a greater story. A truth that's even more important than your personal happiness.

And so, I hope that what you'd find if you came to this church is we're living not just to fulfill our own personal needs. And we're not turned into a tribe.

Which basically says, well, we're right in our little corner and everyone else is wrong. Historic Christianity must turn us outwards to love people and serve others.

And it may well be tonight that you've never investigated it. I keep meeting people in London and it's never crossed their minds to consider Jesus Christ.

[9 : 43] They've never read the Bible. I spoke at Eton College on Tuesday night. And one of the very posh boys over dinner asked me where in the Bible he would find Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves. He'll probably be Prime Minister won't be in 20 years. But it struck me that even there, he'd never taken the time to explore Christianity.

The very best thing that I can say to you tonight is come along. Sit in. Listen. Meet us. Ask us. See if what I've said tonight is for real.

This building is like it is because we want the people of West Ealing and Ealing to know the truth that there is a God who is interested in you.

And there is a God who's done something about it. And there is a God who has sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into the world so that you might know him. Thank you again for coming.

[10 : 44] Please do. Come along. Thank you.