

At St. Bartholomew the Great

“Fear not, little flock, the kingdom is yours
until I come. Behold, I come quickly.”

(Doctrine & Covenants 35:27)

Leaving St. Paul’s where, in the
vastness of Wren’s great church,
multitudes stream and swell and
God is defined in splendor and space,
I walk down King Edward and Little
Britain Streets to the old Norman church
where a few congregants worship amidst
worn stones and windows clear
as English summer skies.

Here in London’s oldest parish church
pilgrims have worshipped eight
centuries and more: farmers, carpenters,
countesses and courtesans have
polished these stones in supplication
for safety from plague, fire, invading hordes,
and the caprice of crowns.

This morning we kneel and face
one another across the ancient choir
(ravaged by Richard Rich when Cromwell
tore churches down to lavish treasure
on the King’s lust).

Here at the crossing, the heart
of the cross, we speak and pray and
sing hymns that gracefully rise
to rounded arches which, like the mind
of God, order our words in a
curve of love.

When Christ came in the middle of time
it was not to the golden-domed
synagogues of David’s city nor to
royal courts and palaces, but to
shepherds in the fields, blessing
the cedars and stars with the glory
of his appearing.

When he comes again, I imagine
it will be on some bright spring
morning, just like today. I see
him flying up the Thames from
the east, passing over St . Paul’s
with its rounded dome and reasoned
columns, its baroque and Byzantine

splendor. Suddenly he will appear
in the sanctuary at St. Bartholomew's
and shopkeepers and clerks,
nurses and nannies, will bow
before his kingdom come.