

ST MARY'S CHURCH, COMMUNITY AND CONFERENCE CENTRE

BRAMALL LANE, SHEFFIELD

Pilgrimage - East Window (3.0m x 6.5m)
and Two Sculptures (each 2.0m high) 2008

This work is a meditation on the human and the divine through the theme of pilgrimage, represented by two sculpted copper figures and a large, five-light stained glass window. 'Pilgrimage' was commissioned for this multi-purpose space by Canon Julian Sullivan following the success of my scheme at Beverley Minster, also on the theme of Pilgrimage. It was dedicated by the Archbishop of York, The Most Reverend and Right Honourable Dr John Sentamu, in March 2009.

Psalm 84 (How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!) provides the starting point for this exploration. The Psalmist grieves at being far from God's house, the temple of Zion. Weak with longing to reach his destination, and in the company of fellow pilgrims, he is filled with awe because his entire life and being cries out for the Living God.



Photograph: Rob Scott

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East Window

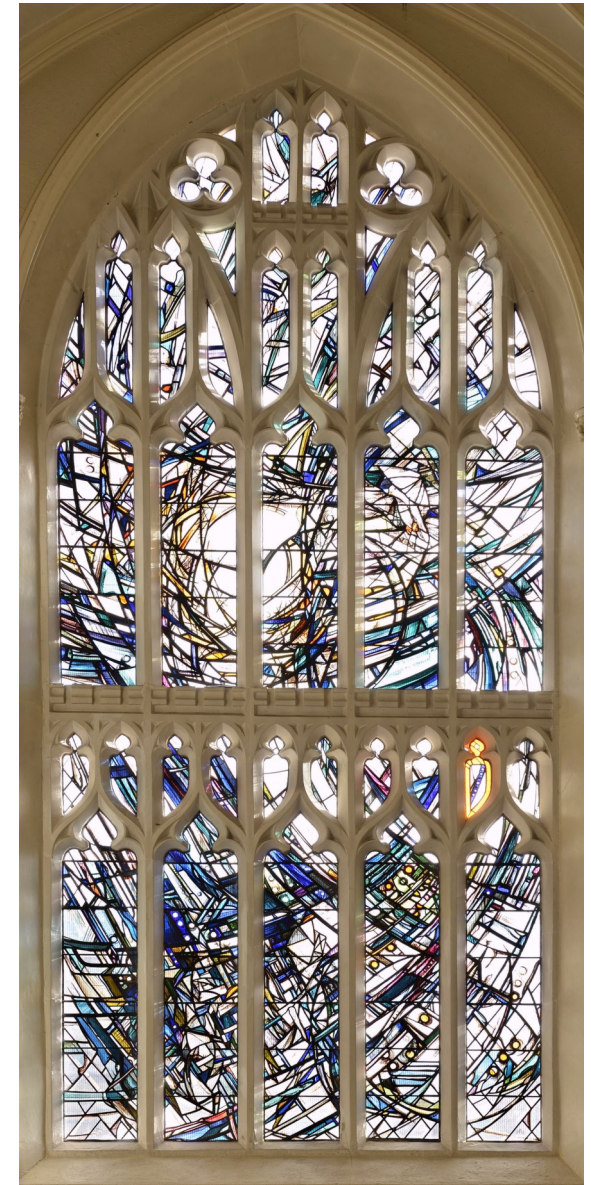
Light, colour and dramatic geometric swirls represent the pathways of the pilgrims and reflect the rich symbolism in the psalm. The journey begins in the bottom left corner with a pathway that sweeps diagonally across the lower half of the window. This represents the dry valley in the psalm. Through this treacherous landscape two adults and a child can be seen making their way towards the House of God.

As the pilgrims pass through the valley a spring appears and droplets of rain fall, creating refreshing pools on the pathway, signifying that their minds are strengthened and illuminated by God, and that the valley will grow less hostile with the autumn rains.

The lush green area symbolises the sense of hope found at the meeting point between the earthly pathway and the spiritual pathway. This is where each pilgrim stands before God hoping to advance their temporal journey and continue it as a spiritual journey towards Zion.

In the upper half of the window the colours of bright orange, yellow and gold announce the heart of the composition. Here is the House of God, a place of security inhabited by the Dove of Peace. The sense of security is heightened by the cross-hatched paintwork which resembles a nest and reflects the words of the psalm: even the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may lay her young.

In the upper section the two paths speak of the cross of sacrifice and redemption and of change and transformation. The swirling circles which dominate the design, the cross itself and the bright light at the heart of the composition represents the Trinity. Radiating upwards from the House of God, numerous triangular fragments of the Holy Spirit scatter out from the apex towards the wider universe.



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Two Sculptures

On each side of the moulded arch framing the sanctuary are two copper sculptures. These life-size figures of a man and a woman are intended to bring the meaning and abstract language of the stained glass much closer to our own human scale and physicality. They invite us to consider the journey we are making through life and encourage us to question the paths we choose.

Emerging from triangles of copper at their base, the figures become more densely modelled and intricate as these elemental forms rise. Ultimately they transform into complex, complete beings as they make their pilgrimage towards truth and spiritual understanding. This journey is expressed in the treatment of the triangular pieces of metal from which they are made: large, loosely-composed triangles at the base represent the deconstruction of the ordinary Self, and small compact triangles at the top representing the Self's reconstruction into a spiritual entity. The triangular shapes not only symbolise the threefold nature of God – the divine love that created us, redeems us and gives us form – but also remind us of the relationship between the sculpture and the shards of glass in the window.

The sculptures and the window have an intricate three-way relationship. One figure gestures towards the images and symbols of pilgrimage and creation in the stained glass whilst the other, in a more introspective pose, invites us to meditate on what we see in the window and apply it to ourselves; the inner journey of faith can lead us to religious truth through reflection and meditation.

The sculptures themselves are set against arched backgrounds, echoing the architecture of the window and the sanctuary. The copper archway also represents the resurrection and is a blueprint from which the sculpted pilgrims are formed and from which our life's journey and soul's purpose is made manifest. Together the triangles and the archway are geometric representations of the transition between the temporal and the spiritual. This form also makes a connection with the Christian idea of the Communion of Saints – the church on earth risen and glorified. The pilgrims are shown at a moment of complete self-awareness (and self-forgetting) when transformation from the worldly to the spiritual has occurred. Full transformation is indicated in the male figure by the downward positioning of his feet.

The artwork's central message is one of Faith and Love – the tenets upon which all pilgrimages are based.



Photograph: Barry Hale