

Vision Sermon for Chell Parish 2022 APCM

This morning's reading from the Lectionary from John's Gospel may at first glance be an unusual one for me to opt for as the basis, the platform for this year's APCM Vision Sermon.

If the passage was unpacked *just* in terms of the origins of the perfume, the comments on Judas' intentions and motivations than maybe so.

But rather I want us to think about what is most likely to have been in the heart of Mary as she anointed Jesus's feet... And Martha.

The feet in those times were things of almost disgust; they had trodden through everything that households had thrown into the streets; let alone what else may have been on the roads – hence it was the job of the Gentile slaves to wash people's feet, never a Jew.

Yet here was Mary, a devout Jewish woman, who chose of her own volition to anoint (wash with perfume) the feet of Jesus, and then to wipe them dry with her hair.

1 Corinthians 11: 15 says 'But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her' – yet Mary offered her hair as a towel or drying cloth.

Mary in every way, showed humility – blessing Jesus through her anointing of Him, gifting him with the costliest thing she probably possessed, - perfume that she would have been saving for either her wedding day or her burial.

Mary in her humility was serving Jesus; blessing him in a way that no one else in the room would have even thought to do.

The next time that Jesus was anointed in this way was after his death; so Mary was by her actions also performing a prophetic action even if she didn't realise it.

Hang on, you might say, what about the other sister, Martha – what was she up to? Luke tells us in verse 2 'Martha served'.

These two words followed from 'they gave a dinner for him' (Jesus)

If Lazarus was reclined at the table, Mary was anointing Jesus' feet – then it was Martha in her serving who was doing all the preparations, cooking and serving the food.

We have already seen these two sisters in Luke 10, when Martha got annoyed at doing the cooking.

Now it seems that she cooks and serves with humility – a servant's heart.

There are a couple of ways of looking at this verse – does it refer simply to the fragrance of the perfume or something or rather someone else?

There is the 'fragrance of Jesus' which we will sing about during the service.

Could it be that Luke was also alluding to this?

If so, what is it?

2 Corinthians 2: 14 - 16

¹⁴ *But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ's triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.*

¹⁵ *For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.* ¹⁶ *To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?*

The fragrance of Jesus was those gathered there, it was the sweet aroma knowing Him for who is; and their being saved was as a beautiful fragrance to Jesus in his Divinity

When Paul wrote those words in 2 Corinthians to that early church; the words were not just for them alone – they are equally applicable to every church in every place where God's people are working out day by day what it means to be disciples of Jesus, and this also intrinsically linked with the humility of the two sisters who feature in the reading from John 12 this morning.

We **are** the fragrance of Jesus in all we do, whatever do as we serve the Lord through serving others.

HOW?

Good question!

I believe that it is by us, as the Body of Christ in Chell parish, doing what we do.

We seek to grow our faith in our Lord Jesus as his disciples to grow our outworking of our faith, individually and collectively, in how we serve the community that God in His Wisdom has placed us.

It is no accident that we are here, each one of us, in this time and place in history. It is my God's Purpose and Plan – yes, even when at times it can be tough.

(a reminder of where we hoped to go from last year's Vision Sermon)

1. Resume the development of the schools work with the other schools in the parish
2. Establish a regular pattern for the Mens' Group
3. With the ministry team and others develop mission outreach initiatives into the housing estates in the Parish pow that we have both churches fit for purpose
4. Revisit plans to grow 'Sundays Kool'
5. Develop a different use of the Sunday Evening Service time; e.g. Healing Services; Deeper teaching on specific Bible passages; Contemporary Worship time.
6. Pay as much as possible of the Parish Share (again)
7. Christmas Tree Festival 2021

8. Community Event at Church of the Saviour in the Summer to promote the church's refurbishment – Hot food, bouncing castle, activities etc.,
- 10 Chell Parish Summer Fayre in 2021
11. Run the Uniform Bank again with partners across the whole City.
12. A church van required for the ongoing collection and distribution of the food for Pop Up Pantry & Food Bank (funds are already coming on!!)

What Happened?

1. We resumed the schools work even though some Covid restrictions did impede this at times.
2. The Mens Group is now meeting quarterly (thanks to Cliff for organising our events)
3. 'Sunday's Kool' has changed nature into craft activities that generally follow the theme of the morning service.
4. We paid as much as possible of the Parish Share, with a £8,000 top up at the end of the year.
5. We ran a Community Open Day at CotS on 21/8/22 and the rain stopped!
6. The Tuesday Bible Study at StMs resumed.
7. Tea with Santa at Church of the Saviour for 75 children.
8. The Christmas Tree Festival returned with new groups and businesses wanting to be involved.
9. At St Michael's the link corridor had a new ceiling and Quiet Room as been refurbished and the roof areas above both made weather tight.
10. Pop Up Pantry is now Community Pantry with 250 members (1 member per family)
11. We clothed 241 children through the Uniform Bank.
12. M Tots is back and up and running.
13. Grapevine Café is back and with more new people being welcomed in
14. New folk & new families coming into St Michaels
15. Our first Confirmation Service in St Michaels for many years.
16. Increase in Baptism requests
17. Huge increase in Wedding Bookings
18. A major amount of work done on the building at Church of the Saviour.
19. New LED lights fitted in St Michaels Church.
20. Light Party at Church of the Saviour
21. Increase in Hall bookings on both sites, which will help with our bills and Parish Share
22. Rev Chris and Chell Parish shortlisted as a Training Incumbent and Training Parish for the new Curates in 2023.
23. Rev Paul has all but finished his Curacy.
24. 73 Christmas Hampers distributed through Community Pantry
25. Bryn Haworth Concert in October 2021
26. Thursday Morning Communion Service in St Michaels has resumed

27. We have our Parish Weekend Away in October this year.

How was this achieved?

Two ways – exactly as in every year.

1. God's guidance and direction.
2. The church members working together, serving together – in the big tasks and the behind the scenes jobs – and as always **my sincere thanks to every person for all that each of you has done and continues to do.**

1 Corin.12 **Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.'**

The Next Horizon...

It is a well coined phrase 'that if you are not moving forward, you don't stand still, you actually slip backwards.'

1. Outreach to bring people to faith & thereby grow our church membership
2. Summer Fayre 2022
3. Christmas Tree Festival 2022
4. Christmas Fayre 2022
5. Obtain secure ongoing funding for our Family Worker post (Becky)
6. Fully pay the Parish Share.
7. Develop new outreach initiatives
8. Ensure our buildings are quinquennial compliant
9. (Covid Restrictions allowing) re-establish our links and presence in the local Care Homes.
10. Replace the front doors at St Michaels
11. Replace the aged flooring in the Hall and café area at Church of the Saviour
12. Ensure Rev Paul gets the Bishops' approval to become Associate Minister to Chell Parish at the end of this Curacy (PCC has passed this)
13. In ALL we do, that the fragrance of Jesus is tangible to all who God brings through our doors.
14. Continue to grow our pastoral visits and care.

And so the Adventure begins...

Proverbs 19:21 says;

**'Many are the plans in a person's heart,
but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.'**

I have laid out *some* plans for this next year, but as we have seen over past years, God leads and provides beyond our imagination – He supercharges our plans; I pray that what I have already spoken may be God's Will for us our churches of Chell Parish.

But my overriding desire is **the Lord's Will be done...on earth, in us as in Heaven.**

**'Commit to the LORD whatever you do,
and he will establish your plans' (Proverbs 13)**

Every year, each Vision Sermon finishes with this call to prayer and the committing of our coming year to the Lord.

This I believe is equally so this year as we move into what we pray is a covid manageable season if not covid free season.

What else can we do?

It's always same answer: Pray, pray and pray again...and may all we do be as an anointing (a blessing) for Jesus, our Lord and Saviour.

In prayer we commit our way forward, our plans and trust God to keep His promises; *especially* this promise from **Proverbs 16:3**

**'Commit to the LORD whatever you do,
and he will establish your plans' (AMEN)**