

This Vision Sermon is that which has been delivered in the Joint Service at St Michael's Church, Chell at 11am on the 2nd April 2023 as part of the APCM. It will also be available on Chell Parish website; see www.chellparish.org.uk

A journey, a long time coming...

Throughout this Lent the Bible Readings each Sunday have again been focussing on some of the different journeys which Jesus made. Sometimes from start to finish, sometimes just part of the journey.

As today is Palm Sunday, the Bible Reading is of the journey into Jerusalem, and so ultimately Calvary.

Yet Max Lucado writes;

'The journey to the cross began long before. As the echo of the crunching of the fruit was still sounding in the garden, Jesus was leaving for Calvary.' Max Lucado, "And the Angels were Silent the Final Week of Jesus"

'Aslan is on the move'

In CS Lewis' Narnia Chronicles the author uses the phrase of 'Aslan is on the move' – the analogy of course is that Aslan is meant to be God, or rather Jesus and so as Aslan (God) is on the move, things happen – life is never the same again – just as when Jesus is on the move on our journeys to faith and in faith in Him.

It was never the same right from the beginning of Jesus' life with the escape to Egypt out of Herod's reach; back to Nazareth; the trip to the Temple as a youngster through to Jesus leaving the Carpenter' shop for the last time as he journeyed into the Judean Wilderness and his time of testing and preparation.

(Image of the donkey on Palm Sunday)

None of Jesus's journeys were unplanned or erratic.

Every journey had been planned since before the world was created – this final journey to Jerusalem was no exception.

The precise details that Jesus gave to his disciples about how and where to find the donkey; what to say if they were challenged and this was just part of Jesus fulfilling the prophecy spoken of Him by the prophet Zechariah over 500 years before Jesus was born.

'Hosanna! Hosanna in the Highest!' Matthew 21:9

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem brought a radical reaction from the crowds.

In our culture we have taken the word 'Hosanna' and made it a term or a word of praise.

However the original meaning is 'Save us' or 'Help, Help us'. – this could be taken by the Roman authorities as an incitement to public disturbance, riot or even rebellion.

Yet Jesus did not call the crowds to silence.

Even the words of the crowd 'Save us' – 'bring us salvation' would be a reality sooner than they could ever have anticipated.

Journey with Jesus

Let's just now step outside the Biblical journeys we have followed with Jesus – and think about our journey with Jesus this past year as Chell Parish.

In last year's Vision Sermon the following was spoken of as what we are today thinking of as the start of our last year's journey with Jesus.

Here are the two slides with a reminder of the horizons set for 2022 into 2023.

'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.
6. Fully pay the Parish Share.
7. Develop new outreach initiatives
8. Ensure our buildings are quinquennial compliant

'Looking to the next horizon'

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.
15. Parish Weekend Away at Scargill House

'What happened?'

The phrase is 'a week is a long time in politics' yet I would say that a year a long time in the life and times of our two churches... and it's easy to forget how God has blessed us day by day, week by week, month on month since our last APCM and my previous Vision Sermon.

Let's start with those items from April 2022 that I have just mentioned....what did happen?

'The answer is plenty'

- 1 New people have come in church through different initiatives, including the occasional offices.
2. We held a very successful 'Santa Saturday' (our Christmas Fayre, 2023 version)
3. We held the Christmas Tree Festival with new groups from the community joining in and they seeking us out too!
4. We paid more of the Parish Share and secured a write off deal for the historical deficit.
5. We undertook routine maintenance on all our buildings, including new radiators in the Hall at St Michaels, more of the floor grills now covered with wood tiles- just 2 examples.

'And there's plenty more'

6. More connections with local Care Homes strengthened (including Rev Chris on call outs for end of life ministry)
7. Replaced the church front doors at St Michaels
- 8 Replaced the flooring at Church of the Saviour in Hall and Café area.
9. Hall, Café area and Kitchen redecorated at Church of the Saviour

10. Rev Paul passed his Curacy and is now Associate Minister licensed to Chell Parish.

11. The pastoral care by all in the church for each other continues.

12. We had our Parish Weekend Away at Scargill House in October 2022

‘A lot more’

More Lent Devotionals required than previously

School Uniforms given out again – plus £1000 obtained for the School Uniforms Summer 2023

A new dishwasher in St Michaels

New focussed Chell Parish Pantry established with 13 volunteers (many from the community)

Funding obtained to cover the weekly free food and toiletries at Pantry.

Secured ‘warm places’ funding for Grapevine Café and Chell Parish Pantry.

After receiving a grant, employed a part time worker for the Pantry.

‘But wait, there’s more!’

We are currently providing free groceries etc. to at least 317 people per week

More groups and individuals are coming into Grapevine Café, e.g. Clement Court, Watermill School

MTots has an all time high of babies, toddlers and their Carers each Wednesday

Even more community groups & other churches wanting to hire the Halls at both churches they want to be, where we are!

More Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals & confirmations booked

Ongoing work with Burnwood School, across all the Year Groups

We are legally a safe place, with the Safeguarding Training and DBS certificates updated

‘Chell Parish working together’

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 absolute 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.'*

(Image of Jesus riding on a donkey with the crowd around him)

Back in our passage this morning, the people asked – and probably had to shout – their 'Who is this' question & only getting a partial answer.

Matthew tell us that the reply was given (vs 11)...

"This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee."

They hadn't seen the whole picture – like only glimpsing part of Jesus as he rode by; they only understood a small part of who Jesus was and is.

So it is I suspect with much of what we do...

'Why?'

The question eventually gets asked,

'Why do you do this?'

That's the opener for us to explain in simple terms that we do what we do because for us it is our faith in action – it's showing the love of Jesus for other people in ways that they can comprehend and understand.

And God willing, they respond to, not to us, but to God.

'And the journey continues'

Jesus' journeys didn't stop on Palm Sunday and ours also continue; the aspects and nature of the journey may change; but we continue on with God's guidance... so our journey continues with; (Some of these are the list drawn up by the PCC in February 2023);

1. Reconfiguration of the Café layout to facilitate Patio Doors to use the lawn area in fine weather.
2. Replacement of St Michaels church organ with a Clavinova keyboard (Organ needing prohibitive repairs)
3. Bell Tower refurbishment and redecoration
4. Parish Away Days at Scargill House in Sept 2023

'Our journey continues'

5. Disabled toilet at Church of the Saviour
6. Replacement of perimeter walls at Church of the Saviour.
7. Work on ceiling, and replacement of broken floor tiles in corridor by the church hall, at St Michael's
8. Hallway corridor painted at Church of the Saviour.
9. Increase of Parish Share to as close to full payment as possible
10. Rev Chris already on list as a Training Incumbent for 2024
11. All this to enable us to reach out in word and action to bring other to Jesus.

'We're not finished yet – journey with Jesus Acts 9:31'

'The church...now had a time of peace and kept on worshipping the Lord. The church became stronger, as the Holy Spirit encouraged it and helped it grow.' CEV (abbrv.)

We sing the words 'It's all about you, Jesus' and it is – all that we do, whether getting our buildings fit for mission purpose, or interacting with people in each circumstance and way is about helping them in their journey of faith or to faith in Jesus, our Saviour, their Saviour.

'Let the journey begin'

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 and no doubt beyond, but as we have seen over very past year, God leads and provides beyond our imagination – He turbo charges 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 16:3

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 so again this year as we move into what we journey onwards in step with the Holy Spirit.

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'**