

APCM April 2018

This is my short reflection at the APCM meeting and the text of my presentation.

Acts 2:42-47

This short reading from Acts will accompany us today and over the next two weeks as I speak about Stewardship. In referring to it during last week's sermon I described it as wistful. It's looking back to how things had been at the beginning of the church.

What is written in our trustees report looks back over the previous year; but I'm not sure any of the entries could be described as 'wistful'!

The Disciples had experienced the extra-ordinary empowerment of the Spirit at Pentecost and Peter had preached a long sermon to those who gathered, we are told that 3,000 people were added to the church on that day.

Looking back, the six verses we have read describe the joy and excitement of being the brand new church. They devoted themselves to teaching, fellowship, breaking bread (communion) and prayers.

The power of the Spirit meant that signs and wonders took place which created an atmosphere of awe.

They cared for each other in practical ways, regarding their possessions as a means to serve rather than anything else.

They met together, ate together, worshipped together and found favour with everyone. Day by day new people joined the church.

I describe it as wistful because they haven't fallen out yet. The first debates and arguments haven't begun. They haven't experienced persecution or harm...all that is to come.

However we re-invent church – and the denominations and "movements" over the centuries (Fresh expressions of church is just one of the latest) have been just that, re-inventing church, they are all trying to recapture the sense of fellowship, purpose, belonging and Spirit of the early church.

As we share together today in the formal parts of the APCM and then in thinking about being church together; don't let go of the reading we heard.

They had problems with finances. They fell out over how things should be done. Just like them we need to seek wisdom as we seek to be the church Jesus wants us to be.

And we shouldn't set ourselves a low goal, a pragmatic working solution that is less than this vision of church. We should seek to be the kind of place that is typified by glad and generous hearts that are praising God and – God willing – will see people daily being added to our number.

Prayer.

Meeting of Parishioners – to elect Church Wardens. Annual Parochial Church Meeting.

Note – the minutes of these meetings will be available as soon as written.

However visionary the dream may be for what we long to see the church becoming and doing (however much we may wish to re-create the experience of the early church) undergirding the mission and ministry is a disciplined approach to worship, serving and finance, each of which I'm preaching on during this short Stewardship season.

- Finance is not the strange cousin we don't talk about.
- Serving is something we are invited to do – but should not become a millstone for us.
- Worship is the response of our hearts to Jesus Christ, however we might express worship best.

We are still in the early days of our relationship; I'm getting to know you and you are getting to know me. I've been visiting and listening and finding out something of your stories and the story of the church.

There's a lot I could say about that – but perhaps it's simplest to point to the things I've been doing to create the environment where confidence in our faith and our life as a church can be strong.

1. Sharing with you the news from PCC meetings is my way of openly engaging the whole church in the shared conversation. (What we are and what we do).
2. Developing the ways in which we worship (the three services) so that people can experience heart-felt worship in the way that most closely meets their need.
3. Looking after the building, making best use of the space, experimenting with furniture or screens and trying to do so without spending a great deal, this I think has been important to demonstrate we are on the move.

4. Thinking and planning for the children and young people and their experience and life of faith.

These are just some of the things that have occupied my time.

Where I have found time. Various ideas have begun to develop that during this next year I hope will take greater shape. A Vision for Holy Trinity and a practical goal that will aid us in growing as a church.

In a moment I'll share a goal for what I hope our giving can become, but we want to know what we are giving for.

People will give towards a shared vision that they believe in. If we know what we are giving for and what we are hoping to achieve, our financial giving feels like it's an active part of our faith response to God.

So what are we giving for?

We give to sustain our life as a church and as a church I think we should seek to experience three things.

To have a living faith.
To be joyful in hope.
To serve with love.

Living faith means that each of us, as disciples, are experiencing day by day the grace and love of God in our lives. Our story becomes the means by which God displays his love to others. We are a canvas and the picture is God's love. I would want everyone to be able to share what God has done for them, not years ago, but last week. What God said, a prayer answered, how things changed, the direction he gives. Living faith means we are alive in faith and living it, moment by moment.

Living faith is expectant, as it was among the early church.

When we live in faith, we are joyful in hope. Hope (for me) isn't some vague wish that things might work out. It's theology, and understanding, the biblical story and understanding that. Hope is something tangible and real to share with those who are lost.

Last week I was invited to pray with someone in the last days of their life, I was advised they were very frightened and troubled. Joyful hope meant I could approach that situation with confidence and speak into with assurance. Joyful hope does NOT say we should always have a smile. It does not ignore mental health or depression or anxiety. Joyful hope says "this story isn't over yet".

Joyful hope plans a church that expects people to encounter Jesus Christ and come to know him as Lord and Saviour. It plans to be supremely welcoming and makes space for someone new.

The love we experience in our living faith and the joy we share in the hope that is ours leads to service as a response to God's love. You can serve begrudgingly. You can serve angrily. You can serve thoughtlessly – it's best though when love motivates service.

Loving service is very evident at Holy Trinity. At Dormy House, at Lynwood, through the pastoral team, the bereavement team, the hosting team and refreshment team and preaching team and musicians and singers and (never start a list because you'll miss someone and something off.....) Of course, like any growing church anywhere, we always need someone else to help.

Living faith, joyful hope, loving service. Three strong strands that describe our life as a church, and like a bright golden thread running through these three strands – the freedom that comes through Jesus Christ.

If you are anxious, burdened, uncertain, stressed, NOT experiencing the "life to the full" that Jesus promised...Jesus seeks to set you free.

As we continue to grow and experience a living faith, joyful hope and loving service, I believe this goal will be something we can work towards that will further shape our life together.

It came out of praying about our finances which as Michele has explained have been on a downward trajectory.

I believe we should seek to grow our finances so that of every pound given

1/3 is for the diocesan mission

1/3 is for domestic ministry

1/3 is for growth and development of mission locally.

I wont mislead you, quite a large portion of what we give to the diocese pays for me, but the surplus pays for mission elsewhere.

Taking the Dicoesan figure as a guide, I believe our domestic ministry – the church, our staff, our services, our young people, our involvement with the Primary school, all the "usual" things – should be sustained from a similar figure. Beyond that, it would be tremendous to have the ability to support new ministry and mission from a third of our budget. Whether that is a children and family worker, or youth worker, or someone to extend the work among the older generation...or whatever additional skills we need to grow God's kingdom, our Third – 1/3 would be towards that.

This would mean we could explain simply where our money goes to anyone new and joining. 1/3 1/3 1/3

From where we are now, it's a very challenging goal, but I am joyful in hope!!

(NB – Currently the Diocesan request is £83,000, therefore we would seek to grow towards

Diocese Mission	£ 83,000
Domestic Ministry	£ 83,000
New growth and mission	£ 83,000
Our goal..	£249,000

I will say more about this when I preach on financial Stewardship and what I believe about that, but very briefly I think that the church would value knowing that we shall follow some simple disciplines.

1. We shall be as diligent as possible on expenditure while seeking to increase income.

Just as an example I want to say a huge thank you to the scaffolding team who gave a lot of time and effort this week to do some necessary work in the church. I think in total about 75 to 80 hours of work cleaning, sorting the lights and windows at a very scary high level – so a very big thank you to Terry, Helena and Rob, to Ted and Peter and Johnnie and to Rogan

The tower cost us £138 but doing the work ourselves is what I'm suggesting as an illustration of this discipline.

2. When our income does balance with expenditure our first duty will be to make sure our reserves are in place in line with PCC policy. This is boring. This is dull. This does not excite anyone or feel like adventurous faith-filled mission, but in fact making sure our reserves are in place will allow us to weather any financial glitch without our ministry grinding to a shuddering halt.

3. When we have the relevant reserves in place, My suggestion is that we follow a discipline of allocating the same amount for domestic ministry as we are required to do for the Diocese. This is not set in stone, but seems to be a good guideline so that we don't run away with ourselves on expenditure.

We should be able to afford the hours our staff work, the in-house costs within a figure equal to what we pay the Diocese.

Special projects. Topping up the reserves and keeping an eye on expenditure might grow confidence in how we handle money, but it doesn't allow for the special projects we feel might be right to try and tackle ON TOP OF what we do with regular income. It might be a single figure stand alone item (like the stage piano) or a more complex development (like new screens) but this is an area to exercise faith. We cannot go ahead unless the money is collected, so it doesn't contradict any of the disciplines we are following, but it does allow for gifts and special funding to be offered as people feel they wish to do.

4. God willing there come a time when our regular income exceeds the 2/3rds of our goal and we start to have money available to develop our mission locally. How will we deal with this?

The discipline here is to set this money aside and let it accumulate into an amount that can then be allocated. For example I have a friend whose children and family worker costs £23,000 per annum. We have to be certain we have the regular income, a reserve and sufficient funding to commit to that kind of development, so surplus funds in the last 1/3rd of our goal will be kept for this purpose.

The early church inevitably hit a problems. One of the first was to do with resources. The Greek Jews complained that their widows were being overlooked in favour of Jewish Widows. The solution to a practical problem was to appoint 7 deacons to administer the distribution – they had disciplines!! One of the deacons was Stephen who is depicted in the West Window – I was up close and personal with him last week on the scaffolding tower.

Finance and Discipline go hand in hand with the vision for being a church that has a living faith, a joyful hope and that offers

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loving service. Disciplines allow there to be confidence for a church a church experiencing and proclaiming freedom in Jesus Christ.

And we are about to sing.....

The chorus says this....

for unless you build this house
I am building it in vain,
unless the work is yours
there is nothing to be gained,
I want something that will stand
when your Holy Fire comes –
something that will last and to hear you say
well done –
giving glory to you Lord,
glory to you Lord.