

Today we reach Passiontide – while not a formal church season –marks the time for the final most intense part of lent and holy week as we focus on Jesus journey to Jerusalem and all that the journey will bring. Traditionally all statues and images are veiled, reflecting how Jesus, in preparation for his final journey, withdrew and hid himself to pray (in John 8) – and so traditionally the church hid the images to remind us of this, but also to encourage to also focus our prayers in the most holy time.

At St Anne’s Passion Sunday has also become the Sunday when we hold our Annual Church Meeting – a Sunday when we take care of all the business, so to speak, before we head into Holy Week and Easter. The APCM is a time for looking back and also looking forward. It marks and records for prosperity what we have achieved in the past twelve months, it provides a time for us as a whole community to hold our office holders, and me as Vicar accountable for the decisions we have made; and it also allows us a space to plan, in our voting and in our discussions for the year ahead. Hopefully it also allows us space to acknowledge the generous spirit of so many in our community.

Because of this, I want to share part of my report with you, as I think it is a good place to also start our Passiontide reflections.

As I wrote the report for the Annual Meeting, I couldn't help but be struck by the level of uncertainty that surrounds us. As I wrote yet another BREXIT bill had been lost in parliament, and no way forward seems clear. Then as a parish we are preparing for a series of farewells to Fr Laurence as he retires on the 31<sup>st</sup> March. In addition to this, I am aware of more changes that are coming – The London Inter Faith Centre which has been a charity for only 5 years, but working much longer, will give up its charity status at the end of the year. Rev John has announced he will retire in Spring 2020; St Andrew's have indicated that they are moving towards closure and there are many questions about our future.

Despite all this uncertainty though I feel thankful and hopeful. We have achieved a great deal in this community ecumenically and through Inter Faith dialogue, and those gifts and legacies will not cease because staff leave, or names change – rather

they live on in our commitment to be the people God has called us to be in this place.

Fr Andrew Teather, our Area Dean used the image of the burning bush when speaking at Fr Laurence's farewell from London Inter Faith Centre. He spoke of how the gift of this image is that neither the bush is consumed, nor the fire burned out – they both co-exist and allow each other to exist. They need each other, yet do not exhaust each other. This is not usually the experience of wood and fire! I found this a helpful image as we approach our next phase of ministry, how do we nurture the fire and passion, without consuming it, or those around us. We have so much to be thankful for, and so much still left to give.

Our building is a hub for many activities, on Sunday's as well as during the week. Over 400 people pass through the doors every week for a variety of activities and events. Our gift of hospitality is welcomed by many who find the space welcoming and safe. Our privileged place within this local community gives us many opportunities; but it also brings with it responsibilities. During 2018 this meant finally

finding a solution to our Dome leak and enjoying the refurbished rotunda. The church is open every day of the week – which is a great opportunity and one we seek to make more of each day.

Our Mission Action Plan (MAP) continues to encourage us ‘confidently share the love of Christ’. I regular use the MAP, as do the PCC, to reflect on what we have achieved and what challenges we still have to face. Our links with, and support of, London Inter Faith Centre, Laurence’s Larder, Salusbury World, Christian Aid Week, St Mungo’s and local families in need continue to be evidence of our generosity as well as our commitment to supporting the vulnerable; though how we do this may change in the coming year. This is not just in terms of money but especially will volunteers which come from within our community in helping all these projects.

We also continue to have good relational links with Islamia School and Rainbow Montessori; and this year have been also caring for Christ Church School. We provide a safe environment for many local community groups, who are coming to understand that we host them and welcome them.

We have a true gift of hospitality and I think we should be proud of the fact that people feel safe in this building, and welcomed!

The networks we provide through My Move, Tea & Chat, and occasional offices (funeral and feast days) have a lasting impact on our local community.

Prayer is at the heart of our life of faith, and public prayer is offered every day. Even if you cannot come to prayer – know that others are praying for the world and for this parish every morning and every evening.

2018 was an interesting year for our worshipping community at St Anne's. Particularly poignant, as with St Andrew's we marked 20 years since the opening of the building on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 2018. Sadly, we also said farewell one of our longest standing members with passing of Patricia Harris in August 2018. Tricia carried so much of the history of this building, having been church warden or secretary for much of the last 20 years. I miss conversations with Tricia not only about the

building, but her wisdom and lovely sense of humour.

One of the gifts of our church is the London Inter Faith Centre – which is a separate charity supported by St Anne’s and St Andrew’s, the resources of the Joint Council and the wider Church. For our part, we gift 95% of Fr Laurence’s time to the LIFC to undertake this work on our behalf. This will now change, but we will not stop nurturing inter faith dialogue. We have good relationships with Islamia, the Al-Khoei Foundation, Al Sadiq and Al Zahra school – and they will continue with St Anne’s. I have committed to continue our Annual Primary School Story Telling Event and I am confident other events will continue in the place, some run by us, others hosted by us and led by others.

2019 brings with it opportunities and challenges for us as a community; but if we work together I do believe God is with us in all that we face. The greatest danger I think we face is ‘assumptions’, and it is important that none of us second guess what the future might hold. Instead we must commit to pray and in our pray discern where God is leading.

So today on this Passion Sunday, not only in our APCM but in our liturgical pattern, we are reminded to let go of the familiar, and acknowledge what has gone before; but most importantly to look forward to what is to come – and for prayer to be a central part of this. And we will need it, as Jesus did all that time ago.

The coming of Passiontide brings with it the familiar and painful journey to the cross. It brings with it the uncomfortable readings of the Passion narrative; and it heightens our awareness to the heart of our faith. Holy Week is the most important week of the Christian Year. We experience Holy Week together as a community, in prayer and vigil, and then we spend the rest of the year unpacking what this means in our day to day pilgrimage.

In John's version of events, the preparation for what is to come, takes place from the moment that Jesus ministry begins. Throughout John's gospel, time and time again, the author unpacks for us the nature of who Jesus is and the implications of this. No more so than today when Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, comes and anoints Jesus feet with expensive oil.

This act of anointing is not unusual. It was common practice in this time period for women or slaves to anoint or wash the feet of guests when they arrived for a meal. But Mary does more than just wash Jesus feet, she anoints them with costly perfume. Note the symbolism – the same Mary who Jesus welcomed to sit at his feet and learn, is now the woman who anoints him with oil – an oil which is a symbol of the death he will endure, and a symbol that Jesus is also the Messiah; and then she wipes them with her hair – an intimate act of love.

In the coming 14 days we will encounter many symbols; we will engage with many stories from the last days of Jesus life; we will struggle to remember the history at the same time as honouring the future; but we do not do it alone. The fragrance of the oil which anointed us in our baptism, will join us with the fragrance of the oil that anointed Jesus. And on the ebb of this fragrance is our combined prayers which will join with Jesus prayers, as he prepared for his final journey, and as we prepare for where our journey will lead us, this Holy time and beyond. Amen.