

Farewell Sermon at St Aidan's, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022, 11 years here.

Joshua 1:1-9; Romans 12:9-18, John 2:1-11.

I've been reflecting on the passage of time, as you do when you come to significant moments, big changes in life.

I grew up in Leicester, an ancient city; my secondary school was built over the site of a medieval monastery, Greyfriars. The playground was right next to the spot where the body of King Richard 111 was discovered a few years ago. Just down the road was a piece of the Roman wall built around the city. The modern city is built upon what was there before, and so on back through time. So, as time has passed the city has grown upwards, each age building on the previous. I think this is a good way to think about how churches develop over time. We can see time as linear, one vicar goes, then another comes along, with little link between the two. But perhaps we should think rather that we are building on what has gone before, so each vicar of a church builds upon the work of the previous one. What we have built together over the past 11 years has built upon the previous 75 years of the life of St Aidan's. So, what we have built, done, achieved, is not past and gone, it is present, and forms a layer of life which will be developed further in the years ahead.

St Paul understood this when he said, *'For we are.. God's building.. like a master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose carefully how they build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than Jesus Christ.'*

*(1 Corinthians 3:9-11)*

Over 37 years ago I was ordained in Chelmsford Cathedral, and I have been seeking to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ ever since. I have served under six Bishops of Chelmsford, three Bishops of Barking and two Bishops of Bradwell. Although I'm not from Essex, I've served all my ordained ministry in this diocese, in five parishes, and now enter a new phase of life and ministry in retirement.

On this, my last Sunday here at St Aidan's, I find that another way of looking at our lives, as a **journey**, is one that also fits well. We are all on a journey through life. We are all created and called by God, and will eventually return to him.

We have journeyed **together** for these past eleven years, and now has God called me on. Some thoughts as I've reflected on the journey we share.

**Thanks.** I want to **give thanks to God** today for his goodness to me and to us at St Aidan's. And **thank you to all** who have been a part of St Aidan's over these years. We have enjoyed special times together, Confirmations, ordinations, anniversaries, weddings, funerals, times of gladness, times of sadness; Christmas jokes and Easter joy, working together for Bazaars and festivals, lunches and times of friendship, learning together in worship, Bible Studies, Quiet Days and Lent Groups. We have been God's gifts to one another. Thank you for all you have taught me, for your examples and encouragement, for your generosity and love. And I thank God today for his faithfulness to me, God is always faithful. On our journey we are all heading towards the same goal, towards God, towards heaven, that is our destination.

This is the ninth move for Julia and I since we were married, so we are used to moving on, but it is never easy, and there is always sadness at leaving behind those whose journeys we have been privileged to share for a while.

We are not going far, so, if you wish to, I hope you will stay in touch.

**Love.** I have read 1 Corinthians 13, all about love, more than any other reading. *‘Love is patient...’* I truly believe that love really is the most important aspect of our character and behaviour. It is not position or status, privilege or wealth that really matter, what lasts eternally is our love. We can do all sorts of things, achieve all sorts of things, but if we have no love, we are really wasting our time! as Paul tells us.

But today I chose Paul’s words to the church in Rome for our epistle, **Romans 12:9-18** *‘Let **love** be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.’*

I commend these words and attitudes to you as you enter the vacancy and pull together with the extra responsibilities this brings. Love, prayer, humility, let these be watchwords for us all as we enter a time of change.

Alongside those qualities remember our text for 2022, *‘Remember that I have commanded you to be **determined and confident!** Don’t be afraid or discouraged, for I, the Lord your God, am with you wherever you go.’* (Joshua 1:9) from our Old Testament reading today: determination and confidence, not in ourselves, but because **God** is with us, and will be with us all in whatever the future holds.

**The Future.** The gospel reading I chose for today is the story of the wedding at Cana in Galilee. After Jesus turned water into wine, the conclusion was, *‘you have kept the **best wine** until now’* (John 2:10)

As Robert Browning says in his poem ‘Rabbi Ben Ezra’:

*‘Grow old along with me! The best is yet to be, the last of life, for which the first was made. Our times are in his hand who saith, ‘A whole I planned, youth shows but half; Trust God: See all, nor be afraid!’*”

Life is built, one year upon another. With God, life can get better as the years pass.

Outwardly we know we get weaker and decline, but inwardly we can grow stronger in the things that are eternal, love, joy, peace... A Christian’s life is always looking forward, to growing closer to God, closer to the joys of eternity, until that day when we meet him face to face.

So, as I end this chapter of life and ministry, I say thank you to Julia and my family for their love and support, thank you to all who have been part of St Aidan’s, and all those among whom I have served, and above all, thanks be to God.

I wouldn’t have wished to do anything else, it has been a privilege and joy, but it demands all we are, which is as it should be. So, thanks be to God.