

St Mary's Parish Church 3rd Sunday before Lent 17/02/19

Isaiah 43:16-21, Psalm 126, Philippians 3:4b-14, John 12:1-8

Tested by Intention

[Intention is a mental state that represents a commitment to carrying out an action or actions in the future.

The road to hell is paved with **good intentions**. – Samuel Johnson]

In the Gospel reading we have, apart from Jesus, 4 main characters, all with different intentions for their lives with Christ:

Martha – a confirmed servant. In every biblical passage Martha is mentioned, she is serving and although that can frustrate her sometimes, her intention is to get on with it, get things done, and make sure people are looked after. Tested by Mary's devotion.

Lazarus has a great testimony – a few verses ago he was dead! Now he is reclining at the table – what a great story! What a witness to the work of Jesus! I am sure his intention is to live life to the full!

Judas also has his own agenda – when Mary anoints Jesus, he quite rightly points out that the money would have fed a lot of people. If we translate that cost to today, it would be the same amount as a couple living on Universal Credit for a year – so quite a lot! So yes, he is right, and don't we all have a Judas around when we don't need them?

Then of course, there is Mary. Her intention? To show absolute and unlimited devotion, whatever the cost to herself. And it wasn't an unplanned act – she didn't

just think, Oh I will pop to my bedroom and get that nard I have been saving for anointment in death! Oh no, it was there in an alabaster jar, ready for sacrificial use on the Saviour who had just given her brother new life. She poured on the nard and then broke the jar (also expensive) so that it couldn't be used again, so that this act was unique. Her test was to put up with Judas!

Have you smelled nard? Not that nice to be honest, so this was not an entirely nice experience on the nose and we know the perfume filled the house. [Nard can help alleviate anxiety and stress. It is also sedative, promotes sleep and enhances the immune system, and helps hair growth – none of which properties you would need if you were dead by the way.] If you would like to smell it, please do try it after the service!

So although the people gathered had entirely different life situations, they all had intentions – all affecting the path of life for each person. And Jesus? Why did he threaten his own reputation by allowing an ex-prostitute to wash his feet in public? Maybe he was thinking of his death on the cross in the not too distant future, but also, maybe he was allowing all those people their own roles, even Judas, in his life.

Our reading from Philippians is magnificent – we can plainly see Paul had intentions – to spread the Gospel, to cut across divides, and to put Christ first – only 3 of many such intentions. Written by Paul 30 years on

from his conversion, he is in prison, in chains and yet at his most joyful, full of his intention to press on with God even through the testing of captivity. This is his intention:

1. To establish that he was a man of learning and experience as both Jew and now Christian
2. To show that even though he was that man, he considered all his previous life as complete and utter rubbish compared with knowing Jesus Christ. The NIV puts it as 'garbage', everything is garbage apart from knowing Jesus
3. To know Christ and to share in His suffering
4. To know the power of the resurrection
5. To press on, forgetting what lies behind and press into the future, following the call of Christ.

To "know" Christ means to have the most intimate of relationships possible. Biblically, "knowing" is generally understood in the sense of marital intimacy, but this "knowing" far surpasses that intimacy; it is the meshing of souls, the divine with mortal. Something happens inside of you when that happens. Something both Paul and Mary were very familiar with.

How many of us can say the same thing this morning? Do we KNOW Christ? Do we consider everything else in life absolute rubbish, garbage, if it is not in Christ?

What is your intention? To be utterly devoted? To press on towards the goal? To count your 'stuff' as

Garbage and know Christ more? Whatever it is, it will test you, but then nothing worthwhile comes without hard work. Press on and take hold of Jesus.

All intentions, like New Year resolutions, are often broken, leaving us with regret and a sense of failure. We can't all be like Paul, we try for a while, and then it all goes wrong! God knows. God really knows. He loves us, he is there, waiting to pick us up, to start again, to give new direction. He has a role for us, he will be there through the testing.

Paul says Do not remember former things press on with what you can, what you believe is right. God does new things. Don't be interested in what God did in your life thirty years ago and regret you are not in that place any more, be interested in what He is doing in your life today.

It is my job as preacher this morning to help you to take these passages and to enable you to live them out in your life this week. Use your 15 minutes with God, and your time sanding your cross to ask God what His intention is for you, what he is doing with your life and what he needs you to do. However you are tested and discouraged, don't listen to the Judases out there who will always rubbish what you do, just consider, as we move toward the cross, that all things are rubbish if they are not rooted and grounded in Christ.