

**2019-04-07 ... 10am Worship Together ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt**

**John 12: 1 - 8**

**'Beautiful or useful?'**

I'd like you to imagine that you were there, before Jesus said anything.

You saw and heard what went on with Mary and Judas ...

Whose side would you have been on and why?

Would you have thought that the perfume should have been sold – put to a practical use ... or was it OK to give it, use it as a gift of love for Jesus?

*(Chat together)*

The gospel passages describe a conflict between what is expensive and beautiful (breaking the expensive jar of perfume over Jesus to prepare him for burial) and what is of more immediate practical 'use' (selling it for the poor instead).

There are many areas of modern church life where this beautiful/useful tension may exist: improvements to buildings, resource-intensive activities and, of course, music and the arts.

We're going to hear a piece now – based on an example in the arts. It brings William Shakespeare to a nameless modern church. It is exaggerated for effect.

[Drama: 'I may not know much about art ...'](#)

A drama sketch pointing up the tension between 'beautiful' and 'useful'.

**Characters**

***Dennis/Denise (Chair of the church creative committee); Will Shakespeare***

*Denise is snipping a large manuscript as Will enters.*

**Denise:** Come in, Will. As you know, I've been put in charge of the church's creative committee. I know – I don't know much about art, but I know what the church needs. Now I want to have a quiet word about your sketch –

**Will:** Play.

**Denise:** *(talking over Will's line)*

... before I left, I asked you to write a little skit for our church family on the Bible's teaching on evil. Two minutes was maximum, funny, beginning with a quote from the Bible – and lots of practical applications we can take away on how not to commit evil. Instead you've sent me one hundred pages called *(looks at the thick manuscript before him, depressed)* **'Macbeth'**!

**PTO**

**Will:** *(eagerly)*

What did you think?

**Denise:**

Frankly, I don't see how we can use it in our church. We need something short with a direct pay-off. I don't think anyone will have time to watch it. Even if we find actors willing to learn lines and rehearse it.

**Will:**

Did you read it or just look at it?

**Denise:**

I got as far as page 20. But I picked up on the gist. Bill – no one's going to be interested in two hours of Scottish nobles warbling on about ambition and supernatural disorder. It just doesn't touch church life.

**Will:**

But it will resonate with the man hungry for promotion, the woman with a guilty secret, the entanglement of evil ...

**Denise:** *(speaking over Will's last phrase)*

And there are witches – witches, Will! Bringing the occult into the church. You should know better. And unsavoury language. Why can't the porter just open the door without letting loose a string of profanities? Fortunately I didn't understand most of it but my son who does English GCSE giggled and I know that's a bad sign. Then your practice of using boys to play women goes right against our child protection policy. Kissed by men! It's not NQWWW – *(before Will asks)* – Not Quite What We Want.

**Will:**

The play is jinxed! *(turning away)*

**Denise:** *(compassionately)*

Will, let me give you a vision for your future in the Church. Creative activities are all right for those taken that way. But a person of your intelligence and communication skills should study to be a preacher, for the business of saving souls and building disciples.

**Will:** *(Pause. Picking up the play and looking at it)*

It's beautiful.

**(continued on next page)**

**Denise:**

But it's not useful.

**Will:**

I'll take my play outside the church. Where people appreciate it.

**Denise:**

Outside the church? Unbelievers? Who'll go and see Macbeth?

**Will:**

Jesus commends a woman for doing something beautiful for him. Others say the money could be better spent. I see which side you take. *(leaves)*

**Denise:** *(sighs)*

Artists. Let's hope Beethoven's made progress on those new songs and Leonardo on the Sunday School colouring sheets. *(To congregation)* I may not know much about art, but I do know what the church needs.

<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2019/100-march-april-2019-c/lent-5-passion-sunday/explore-respond>

Food for thought – and for prayer too ...

As well as thinking about buildings, music and the arts separately, we could relate this theme to any time spent in worship ... is this a good use of our time ... some would no doubt say it was a complete waste of time.

But Mary's gift and our worship have something very important at their core ... they are about our relationship with Jesus. If we don't give time, money, effort to that – we can't live for him in the day to day, "active" parts of our lives. We need that relationship to be strong in order for our Christian service to be strong

Amen.