

2019-04-07 ... 3.00pm Shropshire Council Civic Service ... St Alkmund's
Revd Canon Judy Hunt
Ecclesiastes 3: 1 – 8; Matthew 5: 13 – 16
'Council Vision'

Prayer

I'm going to start with a quote from our Queen:

“To all those who have suffered as a consequence of our troubled past I extend my sincere thoughts and deep sympathy. With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all.”

This was said in Dublin about the relationship between Ireland and the UK

It was the phrase “with the benefit of historical hindsight” that struck me as being appropriate for this service today.

Often in recent months, we've heard a related question asked about our Parliamentary representatives – how will 'history' look back at the process of Brexit?

Today, there's a chance to reflect more locally.

For Shropshire Councillors and Officers, for Town & Parish Councillors and Officers – when people look back at the years 2018 to 2020 locally – what verdict will be passed?

The task of leading in times of great change carries considerable challenge.

I'm going to use two insights that come from a time I taught on a clergy leadership course – and see if exploring them, together with our Bible readings, brings insight to the task of Local Government.

The first is this:

“How can you picture the difference between leadership and management?”

Well, think of a task requiring a ladder:

Management will ensure that the ladder is sturdy and safe; well positioned and secured; and that those using it are trained in health and safety.

Leadership will ensure that the ladder is against the right wall ... and at the right time”

PTO

That links strongly to our first Bible reading – **“for everything there is a time”**. And a time for opposites:

to plant or to pluck up ...
to keep or to throw away ...

As our County lives through these times of increased demand on social care, of increased emphasis on sustainability and recycling, of increased expectations for accountability and so on There's a great need, an increased need for discernment not only of what to do but when and how to do it.

Which leads me to the second insight from this clergy leadership programme:

“There are good ideas and there are God ideas”

What is the difference? Well, most of us – unless we're absolute pessimists or “Eeyore” – can think of lots and lots of good ideas ... things that ‘should’ be done, things that ‘could’ be done; things that would make a real positive difference.

But each of those ‘good ideas’ is only a ‘God’ idea if the timing is right, if the gifts and skills are available, if the vulnerable are protected and helped to flourish.

And that links to our second Bible reading – about the need to be salt and light ... and to recognise that salt can lose its taste ... what has worked in the past may no longer be appropriate and has to be thrown out ... it's the overall aim we need to keep in mind, not the method we use to achieve it.

One approach to this is to try and develop skills in thought processes that enable us to leap forwards in time and look back at now. To develop hindsight without waiting for the passage of time! Such an approach helps us to take an overview – helps us to differentiate between aim and method, between critically important and generally beneficial. It aids discernment between ‘good idea’ and ‘God idea’.

Leadership in Local Government – as you all know – is a complex task. It can also be a rewarding role and, when executed well, it's one that local communities benefit from greatly – whether or not gratitude is actually expressed.

May you be given the wisdom you need to lead appropriately – discerning the right time to keep what is working well in certain areas and the time to change what is done in others, together with the understanding of what should be done instead.

And may the work that you do be used by God to provide healing salt and light for life in our communities.