

5th Sunday in Easter – Year A 2023

Acts 6:1-7; Psalm 32; 1st Peter 2:4-9; John 14:1-12

I went for a walk in Ashby Cemetery a few mornings ago. I like the quite, but it was also promising a fine day with the flowers out in all their splendour, the sun just beginning to warm the air which was stirring the branches and leaves. I like to look at the headstones and read some of the short stories there. If it is for a child I say a prayer for the parents. Some of the graves are very old and you have to brush away the foliage to see what was carved into the stone, and sometimes there is only a trace of a name or an epitaph about eternal remembrance.

After kneeling down to read one, I felt I was being watched and so looked over my right shoulder. There, about 6 or 7 meters away sat a fox, with his tail wrapped around his front feet and his ears standing up alert. He was peering at me intently. I thought I recognised him. ‘Hello, again, Mr. Fox.’ I said.

Silence

‘It has been a while since I last saw you’

Silence

‘Nothing to say, huh?’

‘I was enjoying silence’, he said, breaking his.

‘Me too. I like it here, amongst the dead.’

‘The anointed ones’, said the fox.

‘Umm, well, I guess you are right, at least some of them will have been anointed before they died’, I responded.

‘Before that’, he said.

I paused searching for his meaning, and then replied, ‘Yes, many will have been baptised and they would have been anointed then. I did not realise that you were a theological fox’.

‘I am not. I do not need to think about such things. I just am.’

‘Perhaps you do not think that you are theological, but you are certainly philosophical.’ I said.

‘Humph,’ he said, ‘This is a time of anointing’, he said after a pause.

I stood up now, and my gaze dropped from fox to the fallen gravestone.

‘Yes. The King will be anointed at his Coronation’

‘Why?’

‘Why?’ I echoed. I thought for a moment. ‘Anointing with oil, is very ancient. It is a sign that you have been put aside for God’s purposes. King David of the Old Testament was anointed. Priests are anointed, and in the Bible some of the prophets were anointed. It is a mark of expectation, in a way, although I never thought of it that way until you asked. It is the mark of the Holy Spirit. The King will be anointed with the Oil of Chrism, made from olive oil and balsam.’

‘Chrism?’ interrupted the fox with a question.

‘“Chrism”, means Christ. So it is the oil of Christ. Interestingly Christ is a title not a name. It means ‘annointing’. Jesus Christ, means Jesus the anointed one. Or ‘God is with us, the anointed one’

‘What is balsam?’ interrupted fox, again.

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‘It is fragrance made usually from resin or oily flowers, such as lavender. It brings to mind the ‘fragrance of Christ’, the beauty of holiness, and of calling, if you will’

‘Go on.’

‘As I was saying, King Charles will be anointed with the Oil of Chrism, the same oil as used at Baptism. It is a sign that he is set apart for God’s purpose, just as a Baptised child or adult is set aside for God. However, as King he has the heavy duty of service to his country. He is given the Holy Spirit to help sustain him and strengthen him, to be a good, Christian King.’

‘What about these other anointed ones?’ asked fox, looking around the cemetery and then back at me.

‘They were anointed at birth to strengthen them for to live lives pleasing to God. The lucky ones were anointed again before death to strengthen them for their last journey home to God. In both cases there is a lovely harmony that they share with the anointing of our new King.’ I paused musing for a moment. Then I said, ‘Well, I must get along Mr. Fox’. It has been nice to speak to you again.’

‘What are you going to do now? He asked’

I am going to write my homily. It is based on John’s Gospel which begins *‘Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, still, and trust in me’*.¹

Will you mention the oils?

‘Yes,’ I said, ‘ I think I will try to make a connection. Goodbye Mr. Fox. I hope to see you around again. And I turned and walked back down the hill towards home leaving my friend the fox still sat there, thinking and being.

¹ John 14:1